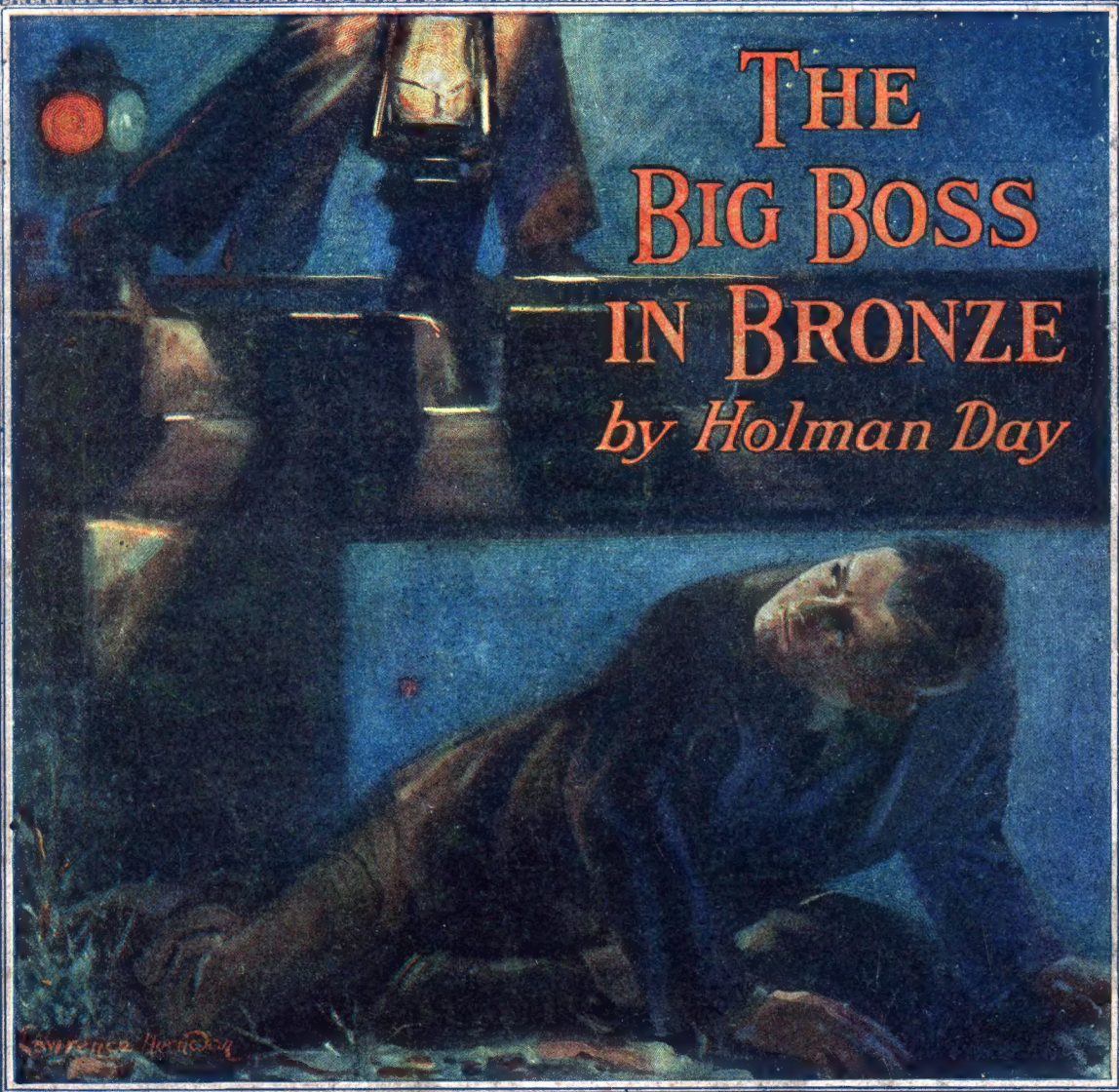
# ARGOSY

## Issued Weekly



## THE BIG BOSS IN BRONZE

*by Holman Day*

10¢ A COPY

FEBRUARY 28

$4.00 A YEAR

# All-Wool Sweater
## Slip-On Ripple Style

There never was a more charming garment for women, young and old. This wonderfully fashionable ripple style sweater has taken women everywhere by storm. From no other garment can a woman get such worlds of wear, such complete satisfaction and such freedom and comfort combined with stylish smart appearance. These sweaters will be the craze of the new season.

### Genuine All-Wool

Only long fibre specially selected yarns are used. Knitted in a close even plain stitch above the waistline and a fancy rack stitch below—just like grandmother would do it. The weight is exactly right for all the year round wear. Slips on over the head.

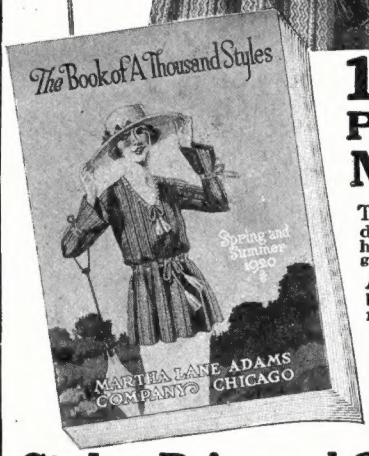
### New Ripple Style

The fitted waistline is offset with a contrasting color, run through with a knitted cord ending in pretty tassels. Strikingly handsome flare to skirt and youthful blousy waist. Below the waist it drapes in soft folds all around. Being knitted form fitting, the shoulders and sleeves set snug and smart, not bulky. The stunning bell shaped cuffs are perfectly delightful and are caught at wrists with a tighter knitted contrasting band, run through with knitted tasseled cords. The lovely rounded neck is also set off with a contrasting color shell edge and knitted cord and tassels in front.

**Order on Approval and Send Only $1.00—**
**Pay Only $1.00 Monthly If Satisfied**

Colors: Turquoise or Liberty Blue, with salmon pink trim; Salmon pink or Coral, with torquoise blue trim; or American Beauty with black trimming. Sizes to fit misses 14 to 20 years, and women, 32 to 44 Bust Measure—no larger.

**No. P4S6401. Price, prepaid, $6.48.**




# 1001 Other Styles
## Prices Like Memories in My Newest Free Book

This sweater is just a sample of my other values in coats, dresses, waists, shoes, suits, millinery, etc. Don't worry and fret about high prices and overlook the chance I bring to you without promise or obligation on your part. Look around to your heart's content and see what others offer.

All I ask is not to forget my new book. It shows all the most beautiful and practical styles at sensible prices. My own designs are recognized as the most copied of all fashions shown anywhere.

## Everything a Woman Wears Sent Prepaid On Approval

My new book will tell you in advance of the season what styles will be most popular. It will help you compare values. Even if you intend to buy elsewhere I want you to have it anyway. It costs you nothing.

## Style—Price and Credit—Take Many Months to Pay

I allow you to pay just about as you please. You don't even need to ask for credit. I take care of all that in *advance*. You can have the loveliest things without waiting, look your prettiest at all times and take months to pay.

But my Credit Plan *alone* would not make many women want to have my Style Book. Style, quality and value must come first. The credit can be considered simply as something *extra*. Write for my Style Book because of its beautiful fashions. Get it because of its splendid bargains. Expect prices that will seem like memories. Your copy is waiting your request.

## Be Posted on the New Styles

My new Style Book will tell the new width and length of skirts; the right height and design of shoes; the newest clothes; the latest weaves; the smartest trimmings.

You will learn from it the most popular modes in dresses; the fashionable colors; the correct ideas in millinery, lingerie or children's wear. Having it in your home is like chumming with a famous style authority. Why not write for it today?

### The Secret of My Bargains

I do away with all extravagances. I never have left-over stocks or sacrifice sales. I have no high-priced salespeople. I deal direct with mills and makers. So I cut out all the profits of the retailer, the wholesaler and the jobber. I never charge anything extra because a style turns out unusually popular.

## Ask for It Early—A Penny Postcard Will Do

My new book will bring you many moments of real pleasure. You will love to rove through its myriad styles. Many things are shown in actual colors. Nothing has been overlooked. I will send any selection prepaid on approval. If you return it, I pay the cost back to me and immediately refund your payment.

**Show Below a Small List of Departments**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aprons | Capes | Corset Covers | Gloves | Slippers |
| Baby Needs | Caps | Corsets | Hats | Stockings |
| Children's Clothes | Chemises | Corset Waists | Hosiery | Suits |
| Bath Robes | Coatees | Underwear | Kimonos | Sweaters |
| Bloomers | Ladies' Coats | Dresses | Millinery | Veils |
| Brassieres | Combinations | Shoes | Lingerie | Vestees |
| | | | | Waists |

**WRITE ME TODAY—A PENNY POSTAL CARD WILL DO.**

**MARTHA LANE ADAMS, 3837 Mosprat Street, CHICAGO**

# Don't Send a Penny

The shoes offered here are such wonderful values that we gladly send them, **no money down.** You will find them so well made and so stylish and such big money-saving bargains that you will surely keep them. So don't hesitate—just fill out and mail the coupon and we will send you a pair of your size. No need for you to pay higher prices when you can buy direct from us—and no need sending money in advance before receiving the shoes. Why pay out $6, $8 or more for shoes not nearly so good? Act now. Mail the coupon today while this special offer holds good. Pay only when shoes arrive. And your money back if you want it.

## Great Work Shoe Offer

We can't tell you enough about these shoes here. This shoe is built to meet the demand for an outdoor city workers' shoe and for the modern farmer. Send and see for yourself. Built on stylish lace Blucher last. The special tanning process makes the leather proof against acids in milk, manure, soil, gasoline, etc. They outwear three ordinary pair of shoes. Most comfortable work shoe ever made. Very soft and easy on the feet. Made by a special process which leaves all the "life" in the leather and gives it wonderful wear-resisting quality. Double soles and heels. Dirt and waterproof tongue. Heavy chrome leather tops. Just slip them on and see if they are not the most comfortable, most wonderful wearing work shoes you ever wore.

Pay only **$4.29** for shoes on arrival. If after examination you don't find them all you expect, send them back and we will refund your money.

**Get This Remarkable Bargain**

**To order these shoes mark X in the ☐ by No. A18027 in coupon. Be sure to give size and width when ordering.**

**Send No Money With Order**

**Mark X in ☐ by No. A15105 in coupon. Be sure to give size wanted.**

### *Send Coupon*

Keep your money until shoes come. Not a cent to pay now. Sent direct to your home on approval. Then let the shoes themselves convince you of their bargain value or return them and get your money back. This is the modern, sensible way to buy—the way thousands are buying their shoes today direct from us—getting satisfaction—saving money. Fill out the coupon and send it now.

**Leonard-Morton & Co.**
**Dept. 2821** **Chicago**

## Stylish Dress Shoe

Special bargain to close out a limited stock of these smart Dress Shoes. Act quickly if you want a pair. Made in classy lace Blucher style. Splendid quality calf uppers. Splendid solid leather soles and heels. Come in black only. At our price these shoes challenge all competition. Make your own decision after you examine and try them on. Sent absolutely on approval. You must see them to appreciate the fine quality of material, workmanship and astonishing bargain value. No money with order. Be sure to give size when ordering.

Pay only **$4.69** for shoes on arrival. And that returned if you don't keep the shoes. Send today because a price like this soon sells the stock.

**Leonard-Morton & Co., Dept. 2821 Chicago**

Send at once the shoes which I have marked X in ☐ below. I will pay price for shoes on arrival with the understanding that if I do not want to keep them I can send them back and you will refund my money.

☐ Work Shoes No. A18027 $4.29 ☐ Dress Shoes No. A15105 $4.69

Size.....

Name.....

Address .....

# THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXVIII **ISSUED WEEKLY** NUMBER 2

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## 1000

It is fitting that the one thousandth issue of The Argosy should contain the first instalment of a new serial of the sea. It is a most unusual sea story, too—different from anything you have ever read. In fact,

## "CLAIMED"

BY FRANCIS STEVENS

is a tremendous story—magnificently done. Beginning in our one thousandth issue

## NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
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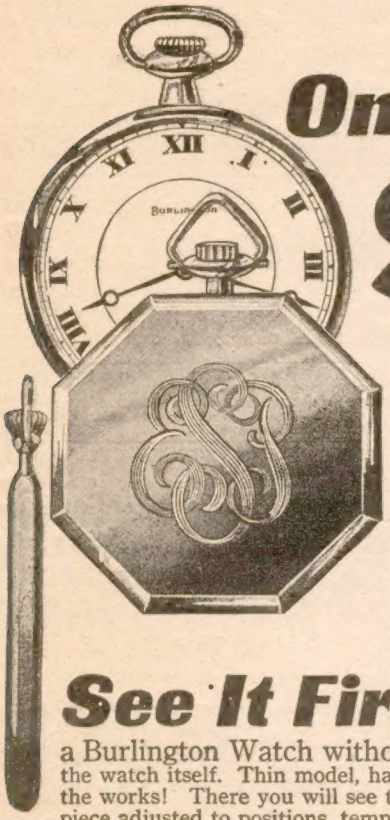
# Look!

21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—
Adjusted to the second—
Adjusted to temperature—
Adjusted to isochronism—
Adjusted to positions—
25-year gold strata case—
Genuine Montgomery Railroad Dial—
New Ideas in Thin Cases.



## Only $3.50 A Month

And all of this for $3.50 per month—a great reduction in watch prices direct to you—a 21 jewel adjusted watch at a rock bottom price. Think of the high grade, guaranteed watch we offer here at such a remarkable price. And, if you wish, you may pay this price at the rate of $3.50 a month. Indeed, the days of exorbitant watch prices have passed.

**See It First** You don't pay a cent to anybody until you see the watch. You don't buy a Burlington Watch without seeing it. Look at the splendid beauty of the watch itself. Thin model, handsomely shaped—aristocratic in every line. Then look at the works! There you will see the masterpiece of the watch maker's skill. A perfect timepiece adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism.

Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.

## Send Your Name on This Free Coupon

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon now. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Send the coupon today for the watch book and our offer.

**Burlington Watch Co.**
19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Dept. 1452 — Chicago, Ill.
Canadian Office: 355 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba

**Burlington Watch Co.**
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1452 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your cash or $3.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

*Name*.....

*Address*.....

.....

# CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**LIVE WIRE AGENTS! WE WANT YOU!** Take orders for **The Liberty Line of Made-to-Measure** combination **Top-Coats, Raincoats** and **Automobile Coats.** Hundreds of orders waiting for you. Our stock of materials is tremendous and deliveries are prompt. Complete selling outfit and sample coat free. Biggest commissions paid. We deliver and collect. Join our sales force of the biggest money-makers by writing for particulars at once. The Liberty Raincoat Company, Dept. 3-B, Dayton, Ohio.

**$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE**—If you take advantage of our startling offer. Write us at once, and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1193, Chicago.

**BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA.** I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month, Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y122, Dayton, Ohio.

**MR. GALLAHER MADE $836.00 IN ONE WEEK** selling Guaranteed Collection Cabinets, used by all business men. Write to-day. Sayers Mfg. Co., 2875 Sheffield Ave., Chicago, Ill.

**AGENTS: SELL NEVERFAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER. HUGE PROFITS. BIG LINE. SAMPLE.** Write today. Sanford-Beal Co., Inc., Dept. A, Newark, N. Y.

**DAVIS' LUCKY 'LEVEN SELLING BETTER THAN EVER.** $3.35 value sells for $1.25. Mrs. Lewis sold 280 in 7½ days—profit $200. "37" varieties of other big winners—150%-250% profit. Great crew managers' proposition. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

**AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS,** a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

**AGENTS: 2 IN 1 REVERSIBLE RAINCOAT.** One side handsome raincoat, reverse side fine dress coat. Something new. Latest style. Not sold in stores. Guaranteed waterproof. Big seller. Write for agency and sample to workers. Thomas Raincoat Co., 1507 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

**YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT** just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 400, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

**SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME.** Position worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

**WE START YOU IN BUSINESS,** furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N.J.

**TAILORING AGENTS IN EVERY COUNTY** to take orders for guaranteed tailor made clothes. We ship you prepaid large merchants outfit if you sell ten or more suits a season. Jay Rose & Co., Market and Quincy Streets, Chicago, Ill.

**INSYDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires.** Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

**SALESMEN**—Side or main line, to sell low-priced 5,000-mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $11.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Write Consolidated Tire Co., 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

**Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine,** fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imptg. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

**$10 DAILY: GOLD WINDOW LETTERS; SAMPLE FREE.** Write to-day. Detroit Sign Letter Company, Dept. A, 1043 Gratiot Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

**SALESMEN**—City or traveling. Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—$2,500 to $10,000 a year. Employment services rendered Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133B, Chicago, Ill.

**AGENTS: New Reversible Raincoat.** Not sold in stores. One side dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Saves $20. Guaranteed waterproof. Big commission. No capital required. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 306 Rue St., Dayton, Ohio.

**PRODUCING TAILORING AGENTS WANTED** to sell men's made to measure suits. Large line 1920 Spring and Summer Samples ready now. Big money for live wires. Ruby Tailors, Dept 165, 329 So. Franklin, Chicago.

## REAL ESTATE—MICHIGAN

**GOOD LAND ON CREDIT. IN MICH. BEST HARDWOOD** co's. Big money in grain, stock, poultry, fruit. 10 to 160 A. Only $15 to $35 per A. Good towns, schools, churches. No swamps or stones. Small down payment. Easy mo. terms. Your credit is good. Big booklet free. Swigart Land Co., Y1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago, Illinois.

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**500 AGENTS WANTED AT ONCE for Mitchell's Magic Marvel Washing Compound.** 300% profit; enormous repeater. Washes clothes spotlessly clean in ten to fifteen minutes. One thousand other uses in every home. Astounds and delights every woman. Nothing else like it. Nature's mightiest cleanser. Contains no lye, lime, acid or wax. Free samples furnished to boost sales. We positively guarantee the sale of every package. Exclusive territory. **Own your own business.** You cannot fail to make big money. Barber, Ohio, made $600 last month. Send for free sample and proof. Hurry, hustle, grab this chance. L. Mitchell & Co., Desk 331, 1312-1314 E. 61st, Chicago.

**MIRACLE MOTOR-GAS** amazes motorists. 3c worth equals gallon gasoline. Eliminates carbon. 300% profit. Isom, Idaho, wires: "Ship 500 packages. Made $70 yesterday." Investigate. Chas. H. Butler Co., Dept. 197, Toledo, Ohio.

**AGENTS—YOUR OWN CLOTHES FREE** and $60.00 a week. Start in your spare time. Tailoring business simply great this year. Write American Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 1433, Chicago, for cloth samples of 60 big sensational sellers.

**AGENTS—$40 TO $100 A WEEK. Free Samples.** Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431-H, N. Clark, Chicago.

**AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER.** Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

**Don't accept agency until you get particulars regarding Bero Tablets.** 400% profit. Customers excited. Agents coining money. Prohibition assures quick sales. Wonderful opportunity. Write quick. Particulars free; sample 25c. Bero Co., 545½ No. Dearborn, Chicago.

**WE PAY $100 MONTHLY SALARY AND FURNISH RIG AND EXPENSES TO INTRODUCE GUARANTEED** Poultry and Stock Powders. Bigler Company, X 506, Springfield, Illinois.

**SCIENCE CREATES NEW AUTO WONDER.** Solves puzzling problem; no more rain or snow-blurred windshields. Mystic Cloth works like magic; deposits invisible chemical film; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours. One agent sold 5,000. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 193, Toledo, Ohio.

**AGENTS AND CREW MANAGERS. NEW FAST SELLING** food specialty. Livest article. Packed your label. Write or wire. Federal Pure Food Co., 2305V Archer Avenue, Chicago.

**SELL What Millions Want.** New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue Free. $100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

**AGENTS: $100 WEEKLY** possible introducing new winter automobile fuel. Specially adapted to cold weather. Starts easy. Adds power, mileage and reduces operating expense. Endorsed by thousands. Territory going like wildfire. Act quick. $28 sample outfit free. L. Ballwey, Dept. 57, Louisville, Ky.

## HELP WANTED

**YOU ARE A FAILURE** if you are working hard, long hours for low pay or your job is insecure. Why not find out without cost whether you can get a Government Position where pay is better, work easier, hours shorter, and many other advantages? There are chances now for thousands of men and women over 18. Let me give you free information. Just write your name, address and number RQ 2001. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

**LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM.** Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

**RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS: $110.00 A MONTH TO START** and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. Three months home study. Situation arranged. Prepare for permanent position. Write for booklet CM 30. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

**U. S. GOVERNMENT WANTS HUNDREDS RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS.** Beginners salary $1300 year. Men, women, 18 up. List positions free. Write today. Franklin Institute, Dept. P-1, Rochester, N. Y.

**WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES** for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

**FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, $140-$200.** Colored Porters, by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

**DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY.** Excellent opportunities for travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

## AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

**BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT.** Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our **big free catalog.** Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

**Classified Advertising continued on page 6, back section.**

# $1.00 DOWN

# Upholstered Solid Oak Library Suite

**Send only $1.00 with the coupon and we will ship you this elegant Mission Library Suite immediately. Our most sensational bargain. See these beautiful pieces in your own home. Examine them thoroughly. If, at the end of thirty days, you are not entirely satisfied, return to us and we will at once refund your dollar and any freight charges you have paid. Order by No. A-109 today. Only $1.00 with the coupon, then $2.50 per month, or only $27.45 in all. Don't put this off. Send the coupon today—now.**

**L. FISH FURNITURE CO., Dept. 1452, Chicago**

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised Mission Library Suite No. A-109. I am to have 30 day's free trial. If I keep the suite I will pay you $2.50 a month. If not satisfied, I am to return the furniture within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

☐ Mission Library Suite No. A-109. $27.45.

*Name* .....

*Address* .....

*Post Office* ..... *State* .....

If you only want Furniture, Rug, Stove, Phonograph, Watch and General Household Catalog, put X in box ☐

## Elegantly Upholstered —Seasoned Solid Oak

This beautiful 4-Piece Mission Set is expertly constructed of selected and thoroughly seasoned solid oak, in fashionable waxed fumed oak finish and upholstered in fine artificial Spanish brown leather. The table has 24 x 34 inch top, with large roomy drawer, and two book shelves with spacious undershelf. The posts are cut from heavy stock, carefully joined and reinforced. The backs of the rocker and chair are high and comfortable. Seats measure 18 x 20 inches and are comfortably padded and upholstered. The jardiniere stand is 18 inches high and the top measures 12 inches square. All upholstery is in artificial Spanish brown leather, guaranteed to give splendid service. Shipping weight of entire suite is about 140 lbs. Pieces not sold separately. Clip the coupon below. Mail it with $1.00 today and we will ship the entire suite for your approval.

## Money Back if Not Satisfied

We have no dissatisfied customers and don't want any. Order 4-Piece Mission Set shipped to your home today. If at the end of 30 days you are not entirely satisfied with it, return at our expense and we will refund your dollar and any freight charges you have paid. No special discount from this advertised price.

## Just $1 and Coupon

Mail them to us today. Have this 4-Piece Mission Set shipped to you on 30 days trial. Pay the balance in the easy monthly payments if you are satisfied. Read the coupon and mail it today.

L. FISH FURNITURE CO. EST. 1858

**L. FISH FURNITURE CO.**
**Dept. 1452 Chicago**

# How I Raised My Earnings from $30 to $1000 a Week

## *The Story of a Young Man's Remarkable Rise, as Told by Himself*

THREE years ago I was earning $30 per week. With a wife and two children to support it was a constant struggle to make both ends meet. We saved very little, and that only by sacrificing things we really needed. Today my earnings average a thousand dollars weekly. I own two automobiles. My children go to private schools. I have just purchased, for cash, a $25,000 home. I go hunting, fishing, motoring, traveling, whenever I care to, and I do less work than ever before.

What I have done, anyone can do—for I am only an average man. I have never gone to college, my education is limited, and I am not "brilliant" by any means. I personally know at least a hundred men who are better business men than I, who are better educated, who are better informed on hundreds of subjects, and who have much better ideas than I ever had. Yet not one of them approaches my earnings. I mention this merely to show that earning capacity is not governed by the extent of a man's education and to convince my readers that there is only *one* reason for my success—a reason I will give herein.

One day, a few years ago, I began to "take stock" of myself. I found that, like most other men, I had energy, ambition, determination. Yet in spite of these assets, for some reason or other I drifted along without getting anywhere. My lack of education bothered me, and I had thought seriously of making further sacrifices in order to better equip myself to earn more. Then I read somewhere that but few *millionaires* ever went to college. Edison, Rockefeller, Hill, Schwab, Carnegie—not one of them had any more schooling than I had.

One day something happened that woke me up to what was wrong with me. It was necessary for me to make a decision on a matter which was of no great consequence. I knew in my heart what was the right thing to do, but something held me back. I said one thing, then another; I decided one way, then another. I couldn't for the life of me make the decision I knew was right.

I lay awake most of that night thinking about the matter—not because it was of any great importance in itself, but because I was beginning to discover myself. Along towards dawn I resolved to try an experiment. I decided to cultivate my will power, believing that if I did this I would not hesitate about making decisions—that when I had an idea I would have sufficient confidence in myself to put it "over"—that I would not be "afraid" of myself, of things or of others. I felt that if I could smash my ideas across I would soon make my presence felt. I knew that heretofore I had always begged for success—had always stood, hat in hand, depending on others to "give" me the things I desired. In short, I was controlled by the will of others. Henceforth, I determined to have a strong will of my own—*to demand and command what I wanted.*

But how shall I begin? What shall I do first? It was easy enough for me to determine to do things—I had "determined" many times before. But this was a question of will power, and I made up my mind that the first step was to muster up enough of my own will power to stick to and carry out my determination.

With this new purpose in mind I applied myself to finding out something more about will power. I was sure that other men must have studied the subject, and the result of their experience would doubtless be of great value to me in understanding the workings of my own will. So, with a directness of purpose that I had scarcely known before, I began my search.

The results at first were discouraging. While a good deal had been written about the memory and other faculties of the brain, I could find nothing that offered any help to me in acquiring the new power that I had hoped might be possible.

But a little later in my investigation I encountered the works of Prof. Frank Channing Haddock. To my amazement and delight I discovered that this eminent scientist, whose name ranks with James, Bergson and Royce, had just completed the most thorough and constructive study of will power ever made. I was astonished

to read his statement, "The will is just as susceptible of development as the muscles of the body"! My question was answered! Eagerly I read further—how Dr. Haddock had devoted twenty years to this study—how he had so completely mastered it that he was actually able to set down the very exercise by which anyone could develop the will, making it a bigger, stronger force each day, simply through an easy, progressive course of training.

It is almost needless to say that I at once began to practice the exercises formulated by Dr. Haddock. And I need not recount the extraordinary results that I obtained almost from the first day. I have already indicated the success that my developed power of will has made for me.

But it may be thought that my case is exceptional. Let me again assure you that I am but an average man, with no super-developed powers, save that of my will. And to further prove my contention, let me cite one or two instances I have since come across, which seem to show conclusively that an indomitable will can be developed by anyone.

One case that comes to my mind is that of a young man who worked in a big factory. He was bright and willing, but seemed to get nowhere. Finally he took up the study of will training, at the suggestion of Mr. W. M. Taylor, the noted efficiency expert, and in less than a year his salary was increased 800%. Then there is the case of C. D. Van Vechten, General Agent of the Northwestern Life Insurance Company, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Just a short time after receiving the methods in will development suggested by Prof. Haddock, he felt that they would be worth from $3,000 to $30,000 to him.

Another man, Dr. H. D. Ferguson, residing in Hot Springs, Ark., increased his earnings from $40 a week to $150 a week in a remarkably short space of time after he began the study of will training. These are but a few—there are many other equally amazing examples which I personally know about. And aside from the financial gain, this training has enabled thousands to overcome drink and other vices almost overnight—has helped overcome sickness and nervousness—has transformed unhappy, envious, discontented people into dominating personalities filled with the joy of living.

Prof. Haddock's lessons, rules and exercises in will training have recently been compiled and published in book form by the Pelton Publishing Co., of Meriden, Conn. Mr. Pelton has authorized me to say that any reader who cares to examine the book may do so without sending any money in advance. In other words, if after a week's reading you do not feel that this book is worth $3.50, the sum asked, return it and you will owe nothing. When you receive your copy for examination I suggest that you first read the articles on: the law of great thinking; how to develop analytical power; how to perfectly concentrate on any subject; how to guard against errors in thought; how to drive from the mind unwelcome thoughts; how to develop fearlessness; how to use the mind in sickness; how to acquire a dominating personality.

Some few doubters will scoff at the idea of will power being the fountainhead of wealth, position and everything we are striving for, and some may say that no mere book can teach the development of the will. But the great mass of intelligent men and women will at least investigate for themselves by sending for the book at the publisher's risk. I am sure that any book that has done for me—and for thousands of others—what "Power of Will" has done—is well worth investigating. It is interesting to note that among the 400,000 owners who have read, used and praised "Power of Will" are such prominent men as Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Gov. McKelvie, of Nebraska; Assistant Postmaster-General Britt; General Manager Christeson, of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis; Senator Arthur Capper; E. T. Meredith, Secretary of Agriculture, and thousands of others.

As a first step in will training, I will suggest immediate action in this matter before you. It is not even necessary to write a letter. Use the form below, if you prefer, addressing it to the Pelton Publishing Company, 54-B Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn., and the book will come by return mail. This one act may mean the turning point of your life, as it has meant to me and to so many others.

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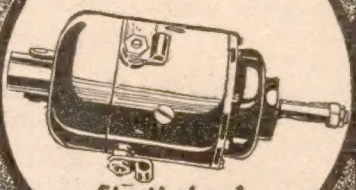

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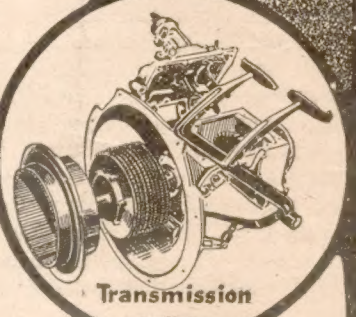

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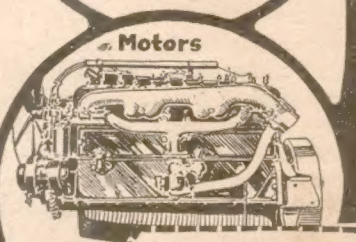

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXVIII SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1920 No. 2

# The Big Boss in Bronze

by Holman Day

## CHAPTER I.

### A DECISION.

WHEN he walked out of the train-shed into the rush of the big city that May morning, Sergeant Barron Douglass, late of the "A. E. F.," was distinctly conscious that he was not returning to civil life with any of the especial ardor which seemed to be prompting most of his home-hankering buddies to grab onto one edge of the old United States and lift the country still higher into a place in the sun.

Watching demobilization back at the camp with considerable indifference, he had not partaken of the others' wild eagerness to go over the top and tackle the old life where they had left it. He knew exactly why he did not want to go home to Canton Center. He scowled and muttered when he thought of the town, now that he was within reaching distance of it.

The other boys who had come in on the train with him scampered like wild game seeking cover—back to the longed-for corners, the familiar friends, the waiting homes.

He walked along slowly, like an idler without a destination.

He tried to put Canton out of his mind and to look himself, mentally, in the face, his vision unobscured by the rancor that Canton's injustice in his case interposed like a glass which made him see red.

Was this sudden lack of interest in affairs, this relaxing into something like torpor of indifference, the result of being thrown upon his own resources, after having ponderous authority in uniforms do all the thinking for him?

In view of what his ambitious aspirations had been before the war, the suspicion that his fiber of independence had been weakened alarmed him.

He had argued, over across, that war would make bigger, better, more self-reliant men, when the readjustment allowed them to follow their elective ambitions.

Yet here he was walking listlessly, dissatisfied, uncertain which way to turn.

He would not go back to Canton. The letter which he had written there to the man who signified more to him than any other in the world meant, had been Sergeant Doug-

lass's way of settling that question definitely.

However, something was the matter with him; he had no desire to go anywhere else.

He stopped in front of a window display of ready-made clothing, and inspected the patterns. Also the prices. Neither patterns nor prices, nor the determination to purchase drew him in. His general uncertainty about himself and his plans was affecting all his acts, and he knew it to be so, and his irritation deepened. At any rate, he could keep his uniform on until he had made his mind up about something.

Having a home—some one place that called imperiously—had concentrated the minds of the other boys upon only one worry: how to get there by the quickest way. In the way of a home, Sergeant Douglass had a closet in a narrow bedroom in a boarding-house in Canton Center, and the empty clothes that were hanging in that closet were not reaching out eager arms to him, according to his way of reckoning.

When he walked into a store, further along the street, he felt more than ever that he was entitled to the chairman's seat on the mourner's bench; he bought some needles and a spool of thread, and found himself nursing the grievance that in the land of welcomed heroes there was then, for him, no smiling maiden with outstretched hand, voicing the plea: "Let me do that, please!" in the matter of a small service.

That was an unhealthy condition of mind in a particularly healthy body, and Sergeant Douglass knew it and gave over trying to think out his problem on his own hook; he was in a mood where he did not know exactly whether he was hating himself or the world. He felt a hankering to open up his troubles to somebody, but, on the other hand, he was quite sure that he would not succumb to the feeling.

Without having taken thought on the matter of direction, he found himself in the city's largest park, and pulled off his service-coat, got out the thread and needle and the red triangle of his discharge chevron, sat down under a tree on the grass and proceeded to make rather poor shift at sewing the insignia on the left arm of the garment. He pricked his fingers and broke the thread and muttered and stabbed with the moistened point of the twisted fiber.

"My mamma says that young eyes are better 'n old ones."

He looked up, holding his pose as a thread-stabber.

She could not have been more than ten years old; she had a right to call twenty-four-year-old eyes aged, Sergeant Douglass reflected, and his scowl was smoothed out. She had a snub nose and the confident air of a young person who was allowed to run loose and look after her own business to a great extent; there was a hole in the knee of her stocking, and a rag-doll was tucked under her arm.

"All right, kiddie. Thread this needle—that's the good girl." Well, after all, the homeland had supplied the helpful maiden to a hero in need. He smiled at her.

She did not return the threaded needle. She snapped authoritative finger.

"Hand me your coat, soldierman."

"Can you sew?"

"Goodness gracious!" she returned scornfully. "Me with Margy here dependent on me for everything she wears, and you ask me whether I can sew!"

He gave her the coat, and she sat down in front of him. She ripped out the few stitches he had inserted.

"Mind you that it goes on with the ends turned down, and—"

"And six inches down from the shoulder-seam," she broke in, still scornful. "Do you think us girls haven't got tongues and don't know what all the things mean on the soldiers' arms?"

"Excuse me."

"You're excused, soldierman. This means you're all done shooting. Means you're going home."

He did not reply.

"I just guess you'll be glad to get home. Gee, how all the boys have been kissed and hugged and danced 'round down in the North End when the folks have turned out to meet 'em. What home are you going to?"

"Oh, it's a long way off."

"What's the name of it?"

He found himself unable to get the word "Canton" out of his mouth, and he had scruples about lying to a child.

"You ain't ashamed of it, are you?" she demanded pertly.

That hankering to open up his troubles! He had a mental sneer for his emotions of the moment. Even this little Miss Met-by-Chance nearly started his tongue going. However, somebody, some time, had had something to say about wisdom coming from the mouths of babes; he wasn't certain who had said it.

He asked her a question with the air of a man who flips a copper, shielding a mental reservation that he'll do just as he likes, anyway:

"Look here, kiddie! Suppose you had been away a long time from where you live, and had started to go back, and all at once remembered that the place's full up with folks that abused you about something you never did, folks that lied about you and, maybe, are waiting for you to get back there so they may harm you some more."

The uncritical child did not grasp the full measure of his tribulation, but she seemed to know what he was trying to get at.

"I guess you'd better leave me out, soldierman. If I should tell you what I've done, when I've been lied about, you'd think I was bragging. But I'll say this much: So long's I've got two fists and a tongue I'll run toward the place where they're lying about me instead of away from it."

"You relish trouble, do you, Miss Up-and-at-It?"

"Trouble's bad. But give 'em a chance to say behind your back that you didn't have enough courage to face it, and I guess then there's something that when you chew on it—"

She put forth the end of her tongue and exhibited a bit of gum for the fraction of a second. "I guess it 'll be what the wrapper says: 'The flavor lasts.'"

"They grow up young these days," he muttered.

"I'm onto you, soldierman!" she said after a time, holding up the sleeve and surveying her work with narrowed eyes. "You have been sucking them lemons they fired at you instead of firing 'em back. I know that when a kid throws a lemon at me it's the kind of a lemon that he don't want to keep for himself. I throw it back, and I take good aim."

Her job satisfied her, and she hopped up and tossed the coat into his lap. He began to fumble in his pocket.

Her sharp eyes noted his movement, and her expression showed she guessed and was resentful. The question that she plumped at him arrested him fumbling. "Say, soldierman, did you get that cap by rights in France, or is it one you borrowed on this side?"

"See here, you little snippet—"

"I've got a right to ask, seeing that you're afraid to buck up to the liars, and now are trying to pay a lady for her war-work. Good-by!"

She curtsied with extravagance of politeness, tipped the doll's head in a bow and frisked away.

Douglass, gazing after her, heard a man laughing and turned to face a soldier who was strolling up. He was an overseas chap, a stranger. "I'll say that our little sister is rapid-fire."

Douglass grunted some sort of a reply. But the stranger was not rebuffed. The child's tart remark had afforded him an opportunity. "I hope she has sized you wrong, Buddy. We boys hadn't ought to be afraid of much of anything."

The soldier sat down beside the sergeant. He had approached from behind. Now, for the first time, he saw the decoration on Douglass's coat which was lying across the sergeant's knees. "Excuse me for joking on such a subject with a chap who is wearing that. And seeing that you have it and are back again, why aren't you looking more tray jolly?" There was real concern in the soldier's tone.

Once more impulse swayed Douglass. He did need a helpful push, one way or the other, he felt. He did not allow his thoughts any time to argue him back into the secretiveness that was natural to him. "Oh, boy, I'm up against a proposition that I left behind me when I went across. But it was waiting for me right on the dock when I came back. The other fellows were seeing their friends and their girls. I saw only—" He shook his head.

"But you don't give a hoot about the story of my life. I'm going to show you something that I've been lugging around with me for some time. It 'll give you a sort of an idea of the ghost that faced me on the dock."

He reached in his pocket and drew forth a small bill-fold. He extracted a worn clipping from a newspaper, handed it to the strange soldier, and waited, his arms hooked around his upcocked knees.

The soldier mumbled the words aloud as he read:

"Last night Dr. Abner Sawtell, of this town—"

He snapped a glance at Douglass.

"What town?"

"Canton—small place up-State."

"—of this town, was held up at the point of a pistol by a masked man in the stretch of woods between here and the shire town, and was forced to hand over a bag containing some five thousand dollars, the proceeds of the war-chest contributions of the towns of Canton, Harmony, Leyant, and Monson, it having been voted to turn in the funds to the General Welfare Committee of the county. He—"

"Well, say, Buddy, what was old Doc Damfool's idea going around—" He checked himself. "Excuse me again. He may be a friend of yours."

"Not especially, I'm afraid."

"But beating it through woods with all that baled mazuma! However, let's see:

"He was making the journey at night because he had patients to visit on the way and desired to be in the shire the next day in order to attend the annual meeting of the County Medical Association, where he was to deliver a paper. The community is much wrought up, because it is felt that the deed was committed by some person in Canton who had knowledge not only that Dr. Sawtell was to make the trip, but was also aware of the valuable cargo he was taking along with him as chairman of the War-Chest Committee."

The soldier looked on the back of the clipping, saw nothing of interest there, and handed the paper to Douglass. "Seems to be an old piece of news."

"Happened just before I enlisted."

The soldier broke on a silence that was prolonged. "What's the answer, Buddy?"

"I was accused of doing the job."

"And you didn't! I'll say so, though I don't know you."

"I wouldn't be showing you that clipping if I had done the job," returned Douglass. He was almost listless in his reply. "I'm all done raving over the thing. That didn't get me anywhere."

"Did they arrest you—do you mean that?"

"No, they didn't actually arrest me. I don't say that Dr. Sawtell accused me exactly. But it amounted to that, though the whole thing was one of those slippery performances—handle eels and you get slime on you.

"I'm talking out because I want to ask you a question in a minute. I need a snap opinion from a disinterested chap, like you, who has been in a place where he gets the fog blown out of his brains.

"I was working in a mill daytimes and reading law evenings in the office of an old fellow—the only man who ever showed me real, helpful kindness. That evening"—he waved the clipping—"when I was alone in the office, Dr. Sawtell dropped in and showed me the money and asked me to stamp the squire's notary seal on strips of paper and paste them over the mouth of the bag. It struck me like a sort of makeshift proposition, and I said so. But all sorts of neighborly chores are asked for in a country village, and I did what he wanted done.

"After he had been robbed he made a lot of talk about wanting to give all the information he could, and maundered on about me being the only man who knew absolutely that he was going to ride to the shire later in the evening after he had called at the law office.

"I read till nigh midnight, and then I went to my boarding-place, and to bed. Nobody called at the office, of course, and nobody saw me going along the street at that hour.

"When Dr. Sawtell had done his talking I didn't have any delusions about where I was getting off. I knew what everybody was saying. I blew up after a time. I guess I made more or less of a fool of myself; but what can you expect after your home-town turns on you when it's a matter of

guess so? I asked 'em to arrest me and to thresh it out. They wouldn't do that."

"Of course they have to take a chap's standing and good reputation of the past into account."

"God knows I tried to make something of myself in that town," declared the young man bitterly. "I had a big handicap. An old money-harker in Canton ruined my father, and after my folks died I was bound out as a kid to a farmer, who always had a cuss-word in his mouth and a larrup-strap in his hand. I humped up and took his abuse; I tried to hump up and take the dirty stuff they fired at me behind my back after this."

He tapped the clipping, then he tore it up and threw it away. "I tried to keep a stiff upper lip, because that old lawyer and one other—well, there were two, at any rate, who were helping me to stick it out. But no matter. I enlisted."

For the two of them, sitting there on the turf, looking into vacancy, needing no words for the filling out of the story to follow that prologue: "I enlisted!" the silence which ensued was pregnant.

"A little while ago I was childish enough to get down on the level of that ten-year-old. That shows that something must be the matter with my mind. Man to man—one of my kind—seeing things in a big way in the place where we have been, if you were in my place, would you go back and allow such polecats to have another chance at you?"

"Gad! No!" exploded the new friend.

"Of course, quitting—"

"You're quitting a bunch that would lie you into murder next if, as you tell me, they were ready to take that first tack in the case of a young fellow who was minding his own business. They'd yap louder next time. Communities take that slant against a chap some times," he proceeded sagely. "I have known of such cases. Some folks keep a goat for a mascot, and others—well, they keep a goat. Don't go back!"

"However—" Douglass paused and stared down at the ground.

The soldier cocked a shrewd side glance at the sergeant and then reached over and slapped him on the shoulder. "Come across now, boy! There's a girl in the old burg!"

Sergeant Douglass rose to his feet and pulled on his coat.

"Going back, are you?" persisted the other.

"No, I'm not going back."

"Then I must have been wrong about the Jane. Kindly overlook all remarks on the subject."

Sergeant Douglass offered no comment.

"I live in the West myself," volunteered the soldier, coming up with a nimble spring and following the sergeant. "But if I can find a good job this way I may stick around. I'm a good deal in your frame of mind: the old home town can get along without me, just as it has been doing for the last two years. What say if we stroll over to the Service Employment hut and see if they don't want a couple of bank presidents?"

"I'm with you," said Douglass curtly, with the air of a man who had arrived at a decision.

"And it's nix on that—what was it—Canton dump."

The sergeant did not reply by words; but if a gesture could have done the job, the circling sweep of his arm would have pushed the town of Canton off the map.

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## CHAPTER II.

### "LET'S GO."

THE two young men marched over into that section of the park where the various "Win the War" huts were herded. There was no longer any inspiring suggestion about anything in those purlieus; pleading posters, urgent banners — wind-worn and weather-stained — and the deserted buildings, all mutely evidenced that the war was over and that other problems were confronting the youth of the land.

In a hut that was war-headquarters for a fraternal order a jackie was banging on a jangly piano and two buck privates were singing: "Till We Meet Again."

"I wonder why somebody hasn't written a song about 'Lay off your old war-bustle, get out and hustle,'" suggested Douglass's new friend. "Right now I'm feeling like

that poet who said: 'I cannot sing the old songs.' Little Tommy Tucker can't sing for his supper any longer, he's got to go out and earn it. I suppose a chap with your education is looking for something nifty."

But right at that moment Sergeant Douglass found something that he was not looking for.

In front of the employment-hut a little old man stood patiently, his hands hooked behind him across the tails of a shiny frock coat. His shrewd eyes were taking in all passers, and when he spied Douglass he tossed his arms with the air of one whose waiting was ended. Greeting the young man with a handclasp did not suffice to express the old man's joy; he shook the fist that was eagerly extended, and then he hugged Douglass.

"I hurried to the camp when I got your letter, bub! I was a little late—you had gone. So I hustled in here, reckoning I'd find you."

"You made a sharp guess on it, squire," said Douglass with a chuckle. "And you're always pretty good in that line."

"I don't know as it was any specially smart guess-work," retorted the old man. "I asked out there at the camp what was usually done with the young chaps who hadn't any sensible notion of what they were going to do next, and I was told that they were apt to be hanging around this place."

He jabbed a thumb gesture at the sign above the employment hut. "That infernal letter of yours made me know that you didn't have any sensible notions left in your head—and that's all there's been to it, in the matter of finding you."

Douglass turned to the grinning soldier with embarrassment that revealed a desire to change the subject. "I didn't get your name—"

"Tommy Tate! Easy said."

"Private Tate, I'd like to have you meet Squire Cassius Nile, of my home town."

The two shook hands. The squire promptly whirled about-face to his law-student; it was plain that Douglass could not be tied up especially with a chap whose name was unknown till the moment before. "Bub, I want to have a talk with you!"

"I'll see you later when you drift back this way," volunteered Private Tate. He put his hand on Douglass's shoulder, leaned close and whispered in his ear. "Don't be too easy, boy! This is a big country—and a fresh deck and a new deal for a good many of us sure makes that war worth while."

He strolled toward the hut, and Douglass marched off beside Squire Nile.

After a few minutes the squire prodded with speech his silent companion. "Well, bub! What say, what say?" It was the familiar, nervous query by which the old man habitually jumped those with whom he conversed.

"You mean about my plans?" Douglass dragged his tone hesitatingly. "Well, my plans—"

"You haven't any plans," barked the squire irritably. "Your letter was enough for me on that point. That's why I'm here. The air of you now convinces me still further. I'm glad I came after you."

"But I'm not going back to Canton Center, sir. My mind is firmly made up on that point."

The old man laid a hand on Douglass's arm and halted him. "Stand right still! Let me make a general survey!"

He walked around his protégé slowly, his shrewd eyes appraising. He talked while he walked.

"Yes! Good— outside is very good. Thickened out in just the right places. Back straight. Head up. Good! Training counts. Has been a fine thing for you— so far as outside goes. Reckon you weren't afraid of the Huns. But, confound you, bub, have you come back a moral coward, so far as Canton is concerned?"

"It isn't a question of cowardice, Squire Nile," protested the young man, hotly.

"The outside of you speaks up splendid! But, by gad, there's something the matter with the inside of you. I tell you, you are coming back to Canton. I won't stand at one side and have you spoiled!"

"Spoiled?"

"Yes, that's the right word."

"It fits what they tried to do to me there! Spoil my name, my hopes and ambitions."

"Are you going to give them the chance to brag that they did so? That's where the spoiling part comes in if you quit so far as Canton is concerned."

He drove his fist down into his palm.

"Look here, bub, you're just starting now to make something of yourself. The war has put a spirit of that sort into you. But whatever you make of yourself, wherever you go—if you don't go back to Canton first and have that thing out with them and yourself—you're always going to have the feeling that you quit—quit is a big thing—at the outset you quit! That feeling will poison your pride in whatever else you accomplish. It can't help doing so.

"I feel a lot as you do about Canton. But it's your home town. You can't put it behind you in your thoughts. You'll always hold a grudge against yourself as a quitter. No man can afford to hate himself. You're coming back to Canton. That devilish town needs a lesson!"

"It can *borrow* some other schoolmaster—it's too mean to *hire* one."

"Old Breck Blaisdell is pointing to that larrup-strap he used on you after he took you out of the industrial school, and is saying you feel too guilty to come back," taunted the squire.

"Who believes that old liar?"

"Well, a man can get away with a lie till he is made to swallow it!"

"I have something more important in life than to go back to Canton and fight with skunks," replied Douglass sullenly.

"Doctor Sawtell thinks that there's a clear field for that cigarette-sucking, dude son of his to marry Nina Bingham, now that you're out of town for good."

"You're going a little too far there, Squire Nile!" protested Sergeant Douglass. "I wouldn't allow any other man to bring Miss Bingham's name up in a talk with me."

"Oh, but I have privileges where you're concerned," returned the old man blandly.

"I know that, sir! You have done more to encourage and help me than anybody else. I want you to know how it stands; there has never been one word between Nina Bingham and myself except in the way of friendship— and very ordinary friendship, at that. What am I? Only a—"

"A slow-poke with the girls—slower than the devil—though that isn't a good comparison, considering the style of Ray Sawtell in that line. But he doesn't seem to be making much progress with Nina Bingham," the squire went on judiciously. "I never thought I'd allow myself to keep close tabs on any courting affairs; it's none of an old bach's business. But after you went went away, bub, I constituted myself a committee of one to attend to your interests, by way of keeping my eye out, and, by golly, I've done it! Now don't say you have no interests in that quarter. You have. We won't argue it!" He put up his palm.

"Now that you're home again, bub, I'm off the case. It's up to you to see that Nina gets a good husband—one that she wants. No matter about the chap's identity! That'll take care of itself after other matters have been attended to."

He put his arm into the hook of Douglass's elbow, and led him along.

"Now we'll quit all joking!"

The sergeant's face had not expressed any appreciation of what the squire termed humor.

"Bub, Canton is in a bad way; and there's worse to come, if I'm any kind of a prophet. I'm not talking now of tongues or of narrow-mindedness. I'm talking of crime."

He set earnest, solemn gaze of his own into the stare that Douglass gave him.

"Crime of the past and crime that is impending unless something is done to prevent. I'm said to be a fair sort of a lawyer and I have eyes to see fairly deep into certain things and a nose that can sniff a blamed sight farther than I can see. There's wickedness in Canton. It's hard to get at. More is brewing, I say. There's a devil at work, but he's wearing a mighty smooth mask. I'm not going to say any more now. I want you to come back there and help me."

"You make it hard for me, sir, considering my obligations—"

Squire Nile released the young man's arm. "Condemn it, that's why I tried to

stir your feelings by putting up your own case to you! I don't want to sound and act like a man who is trying to cash in on obligations. You owe me nothing. I have been proud to be a means of helping you with my old books and my old advice. Leave me out of it!

"But listen to me! It's more especially for you than the crime thing, maybe. There are others in Canton who have been watching the inclinations of Nina Bingham more sharply than I have, because they have had a better opportunity. Her uncle, for instance! Bub, I have plenty of chance to watch one thing almighty close—and that's probate business at the register's office in the shire town. If that old money-mad miser of a Swinton Tingley doesn't keep his niece, Nina, single, or marry her off to the right kind of a fool, he'll go to state prison when there's a showdown in her money affairs. He was inside the law when he ruined your folks; but, by the mighty, he didn't bother about law when the matter was inside his own family after Nina's folks died.

"And more than one reason was behind the job that was put up on you—to run you out of Canton. I don't know how much the price was or just how much was paid! Now that girl is in danger in more ways than one. But you must come and use your own eyes and ears. I have tried to gnaw through so as to get a peek, but my old teeth are dull. Bub, a two-fisted chap like you must come up there and break through! That's all! I'm done talking!"

He broke off suddenly. Then he astonished the young man by turning his back and trudging away.

"Squire Nile, you're putting too big a value on my ability. A poor cuss of my caliber can't straighten out Canton."

"Probably not— not if you stay in the state of mind you're in now. I'm sorry you used up all your grit in fighting Huns."

"But just a minute! Please, just a minute!"

Squire Nile turned and came back with as much speed as he had shown in marching away. He put out his hand to Sergeant Douglass. "Mind you this! I'm not asking you to come along with me. I wouldn't allow you to come now if you wanted to."

"But I don't deserve to be kicked onto the scrap-heap even though I don't belong on a pedestal."

"You must figure for yourself where you belong, bub. I don't know as I'd have the highest opinion of you if you allowed me to drag you by the scruff o' your neck right now, on my sayso. Come on your own hook, or stay away! But let me say this much: There are a lot of good folks in the old town. You have friends there, and they don't believe you are a highway robber. But the bad apples up there are fast spoiling the good apples. Nature works the same whether it's vegetables or character! If Canton isn't saved from itself the 'bads' will have it all their own way.

"Think it over for yourself, bub, and drop me a line. What say! If you come, I'll see to it that you get something in the way of a welcome. If you don't come, God bless you! Good-by! I've got to catch a train."

He hurried away. He did not turn to look behind, but he kept shooting his arm up above his head and waggling his open hand.

When the little squire had merged himself with the throng on the mall, Douglass stood where he had been left.

After long meditation he moved slowly back in the direction of the employment hut! Then, all at once, he turned with a military snap of the body, and strode away in the opposite direction. "I reckon the jury has heard both sides of the argument and the judge's charge," he muttered. "The jury will now retire and arrive at a verdict."

But the squire's ominous utterances had presented the case of Canton in a more hateful light than ever, he reflected.

Previously in his ponderings on his hopes and his plans, he had set the matter of Nina Bingham quite apart from his consideration of the town. He had never presumed enough of their acquaintance to consider that she could love him, as he was—a boy who had been bound out to a farmer, then a mill-toiler in the village—a law-student by the sufferance of the old squire.

"He had nursed the typical dream of

the young man! To go away, make good, and come back in dashing style to seek the hand of Canton's rich man's heiress! To go back now, simply poor Barron Douglass, was knocking down a fairy castle in which he had been taking fond delight while he erected it.

He rather resented the manner in which Squire Nile had injected his appeal into those plans which better suited the mood of a young man who had been abroad and had seen the bigger things and now proposed to grab in on 'em! Out of that foggy sort of resentment came something like a determination, as he walked on through the park, to allow the Canton cats to claw themselves to ribbons.

" He had very set ideas as to the manner in which he wished to appear before Nina Bingham. What did an old bachelor, like Cassius Nile, understand when it came to girls and their notions? Douglass entertained no foolish thoughts about a uniform and the glamor of war. Nina Bingham was a girl of another sort.

He had in mind the nature of the letter he would write to her—he felt that now he dared to send it. She would understand—perhaps she would wait! What the squire had said had been encouraging, though the squire knew more about law than he did about love.

Therefore, with a mind made up, Sergeant Douglass proceeded through the park.

That letter to Nina—the right kind of a letter—was haunting his thoughts. He sat on a bench and got out a pencil and a notebook and proceeded to jot down some of the ideas his emotions had suggested; he was afraid that in a cooler moment he wouldn't be able to find such ideas.

Occasionally, between lines, he raised his eyes, like an epic poet who was seeking inspiration. There was an equestrian statue right in front of him in the little groove where he sat, off the path; it was George Washington in bronze.

Sergeant Douglass found himself looking directly into the steady eyes. Whenever he lifted his gaze the eyes were on him; even the pose of the horse, forefoot uplifted, suggested a halt to learn what this modern-day soldier was about when off duty.

The young man began to show lack of interest in his writing, and he stared for longer periods at the placid face of the great man on high.

Douglass was not an egotist; in that moment he was feeling very small and worthless; some deep thoughts had begun to stir in him. It might have seemed like egotism even to stretch his imagination to the fantastic point of thinking that the statue of so great a man would waste a glance on the poor puzzled mortal gazing up with a new sense of awe and reverence and apppreciation of what this man had stood for in the flesh.

The sergeant rose slowly and put the book and the pencil back into his pocket.

In place of a letter full of vague promises and self-exculpation, his projected letter to a girl, he was framing in his thoughts a terse telegram to a man—a message to Cassius Nile, a notification that would meet the lawyer on his arrival in Canton.

Sergeant Douglass was going home!

He stood very straight and snapped a salute, his eyes meeting the bronze eyes above.

In all his soul he knew the strength of the pledge which that salute signified.

" I was near being a quitter," he murmured. " Something you never were, big boss."

He turned and went on his way, head up. " Let's go, boy! Otherwise, a h—l of a soldier I'd be!"

## CHAPTER III.

### " WELCOME HERO!"

AT Cornish, the shire town of Sergeant Douglass's home county, a jolly party of discharged soldiers left the train.

A band struck up, on the station platform, and there were acclaiming cheers.

The soldiers shrugged their shoulders into their lug-straps and shook hands with Douglass, who stood up and gripped their palms as they passed him. They were filled with excited and hilarious anticipation.

Then the young man sat down alone, and admitted that welcomed soldiers ought to feel that way!

He was wondering whether any far-traveling waves from the upheaval of the great war had slapped a little, human-nature moisture on the arid soil of Canton Center. He read the eight words of a telegram once more. It was signed "Committee." The thrifty had kept inside the word limit, all right!

Welcome hero station banquet Methodist vestry Townhall speeches.

He condemned his thoughts because he was thus rolling up the lip of this gift horse.

Undoubtedly Squire Cassius Nile had been busy since the arrival of Douglass's message!

One of the phrases that the sergeant had picked up in France was "arrière penseé." His Yankee mind translated thus: "to be taken with a pinch of salt." He was rather disgusted with his persistent resentment because the phrase popped into his mind at that moment.

He found himself wishing that it was Lieutenant Dorntee instead of himself who was coming back to the old town. Dorntee was the son of the Methodist pastor, and had died at St. Mihiel.

Douglass was arguing himself into a state of mind where he was afraid that Canton would hold it up against him because he was still alive. He plucked off his decoration and stuffed it into his trouser pocket; he had won the cross when he had gone back into hell to get young Dorntee.

He got the lieutenant, and took along for good measure six Germans who were holding the officer as a prisoner; it was in a later engagement that Dorntee was killed. The sergeant knew the general attitude of Canton toward those who presumed to parade airs, no matter how airs might be justified!

When the train swung around the long curve of the river's bend, he saw the huddled houses of Canton Center. The hills hooped the village in. He felt the pettiness of life beginning to cramp his thoughts already. He had come from an arena so vast that it's only bounds were the solemn ramparts of Death. He was about to step down into a hollow among the hills where all was circumscribed by the narrow conventions of Life—as Canton elected to live it.

He stood up and hung his martial equipment on his person. A fat traveling salesman, a participant in a card game across the car isle, cocked a non-appreciative eye at the soldier. "I reckon you'll be glad to get them duds off, son!"

"Yes."

"Well, the rest of the country is right with you there! We're all getting sick of uniforms."

Sergeant Douglass stooped down and peered from the car window while the train grated to its halt.

There they were!

All the faces he knew so well!

Old Breck Blaisdell's red whiskers splotching their mark in the throng! Young Douglass, in his new understanding of what retribution consisted of and stood for, felt a hankering to twist his fingers into those hateful whiskers and twitch them out by the roots.

There was an attempt at band music when the train had pulled up. Some relics of the defunct Canton Cornet Band squawked moistily on horns and pounded vigorously on drums.

Sergeant Douglass was pulled and pump-handled. But he did not thrust forth a really cordial hand till Squire Cassius Nile came elbowing his way through the press. "Gracious grief, boy! I'm glad you're back again, safe and sound," said the old lawyer.

That sonorous declaration was for the ears of the mob and was a broad hint, accompanied by a sly wink, that the squire had kept his own counsel in regard to his flying trip to the camp and the city. Douglass's grip and his smile gave thanks.

"I'll show up at the office in the morning," he said.

The warty hand of Breck Blaisdell was thrust between the two.

Sergeant Douglass disregarded it, suddenly rising on tiptoe to look over the heads that intervened between him and a pretty girl. He pushed violently against the bar offered by Blaisdell's arm, and forced his passage to the girl.

He put out both his hands and took hers

in a clasp that continued for a few moments. But the peering greeters could not allege that his attitude or the words that he spoke were lovelike. The short conversation was not sotto voice. He informed her in tones which all heard that he was glad to see her. She frankly told him the same. And as frankly and openly she said that she would be at the hall that evening and hoped that they would find an opportunity for a chat.

A woman on the platform nudged a neighbor.

"Looks like he's come back with high and lordly notions of how nothing ain't too good for him these days. That's what getting over there and strutting around in soldier rig had done to a lot of 'em. They don't know their places any longer."

That evening, however, when Sergeant Douglass was escorted to a place on the stage of townhall, he was telling himself that he did not belong there. In his heart he was deprecating all this fuss that had been made over him. Some of the "hardshells" among those who stared up at his sober countenance decided that his solemnity was pride and they whispered sarcastic comments among themselves; he gazed down at them and knew that malice was still pursuing him.

The only feature that reconciled Sergeant Douglass to that townhall ordeal was the presence of Squire Nile as chairman. The welcomed hero sat close beside the squire's amchair. Every now and then the squire whispered a comment on some face in the throng or on some remark by a speaker. They were the same sort of comments, humorous or caustic, that had formerly enlivened their companionship in the law-office. Douglass, focus for all eyes while he sat on the stage, began to feel more at ease.

And then the squire went to the front of the rostrum to make the real speech of welcome! He clasped his hands behind him across the wrinkled tails of the familiar old frock coat. He leaned forward and swept a wistfully smiling gaze across the faces upturned. "I'm sure we're all glad to have bub back here with us again, neighbors," he said.

For an instant, the young man was afraid that he was about to show emotion; something in his throat was not just right.

But he set his jaws hard and thought long, long thoughts while the old lawyer talked on.

The young man had never found the rigors of an industrial school nor the rawness of a larrup strap conducive as agents in softening or cultivating the milder emotions. As a matter of fact, he had put away tears at an early age; they confessed that the persecutors had triumphed! He did not like to gratify them to that extent. No tears for him.

He had held himself under good control even when the muted bands wailed: "Till We Meet Again," playing the appealing strains among the graves across the sea. Every man about him had sobbed like a baby when the band of the welcoming committee sent the melody of "Home, Sweet Home" echoing against the brine-washed sides of the transport. But Sergeant Douglass did not weep.

"Home, Sweet Home!" He could imagine what that suggestion of home meant to most of the boys. He did not wonder a bit that they cried and sobbed openly. He was glad to see them do it. But as for him, when he heard the tune, he fell to wondering whether Mrs. Bristow had allowed the moths to eat up the two suits of clothes and an overcoat that she had promised to take good care of while he was away.

He boarded at Mrs. Bristow's in Canton Center. She gave him a back room and victuals middling so-so for one dollar a day—and even that price had been considerable of a drain on the resources of a law student who worked on the day shift in a paper mill and read law evenings.

He had promptly found Nina Bingham in the townhall crowd.

Every now and then she gave him a little nod or else a fleeting smile that curved her red lips. He was glad to remember that he had written to her from abroad—only a few letters; he had sent some souvenirs, little, no-account things. She had replied to his letters after the same frankly friendly manner in which they had chatted on the streets of Canton.

"I reckon I know bub, here, a little speck better than the rest of you."

The squire was carrying on! Douglass blinked gratefully at this stanch friend. He was truly an honest old fellow who believed in diction, plain, and unadorned. His student had heard him talk that way to juries, his hands across the tails of the shiny frock coat; it was so shiny that the young lawyers called it Niles's steel suit; they referred to the knee-stretched trousers as his "jury pants," and humorously claimed that he was taking an unfair advantage of opposing counsel by dressing himself "down to the people."

"I knew his folks—his father and his mother, friends. They were good soldiers, too—both of 'em. This is all between neighbors to-night! The Douglasses were good fighters. But they had for an enemy something that was too well entrenched. They fought a twelve per cent mortgage—and a twelve per cent mortgage is worse than any Hun foe could think of being; it never gives quarter, nor does it come out and shout 'Kamerad!' But I don't intend to be too personal to-night!"

Nina Bingham interlaced her fingers and lowered her eyes to avoid the side glances of those who sat near her. For the first time Sergeant Douglass found himself resenting the old lawyer's caustic style. He dug nervous fingers into the spirals that encased his legs. That thrust at Swinton Tingley, her uncle, was too obvious!

"It's too bad the right kind of epitaphs cannot be placed above the poor victims who die in unequal conflict, whether in peace or war, my neighbors. There would be due need of honor to the slain, and more shame for the living oppressor.

"That's enough on that point. I want you all to realize that bub, here, was obliged to start late and to depend on himself. He is back again. I hope and trust that this gathering feels as I do about him. Let's carry that feeling out of town hall, and remember it to-morrow and on the days to follow. Three cheers are not bread, and the echo doesn't spread butter!" He walked back to Sergeant Douglass, took his hand and raised him to his feet. "Say a few words to the neighbors, bub!"

But all at once young Douglass found something in his throat that swelled and ached. He put his free hand there for comfort. Then the tears that had been held back for so long came into his eyes and dripped on his cheeks. He wiped them away with the sleeve that bore the three gold bars, and sat down without a word. The old lawyer patted his shoulder. "It's a good speech, bub! Words only spoil that kind of a speech. Friends don't need a lot of language; save your language for juries."

Then he led his protégé down from the platform and gave him over to the folks of Canton.

On the floor of town hall Sergeant Douglass found no opportunity for that chat with Nina. But over the heads of the groups that surrounded him he exchanged glances with her, and when the crowds thinned at last he went to her. He was conscious of a new and happy courage.

Ray Sawtell was with her—a fat and florid young man who, up to that time, had displayed no inclination to press the hand of the hero. In Sawtell's case, as in others during that public trial of the mood of the welcomed son of Canton, young Douglass concealed bitterness under a mask of exaggerated cordiality.

The squire had suggested in a whisper: "Go ahead and cheek 'em." The sergeant's ardent grudge hardly needed that spur. As a native, he understood the best way of making his enemies in Canton uncomfortable. Therefore, he grabbed Sawtell's hand and slapped his rival's back with a most hearty affectation of friendship.

"I'm sorry you were out o' luck, Ray, and missed the big show! Your father ought to have used his pull with the examining board so that you could have been smuggled in!" It had been broadly hinted that Dr. Sawtell had used his pull to keep his son out. "However, some of the hustlers had to stay at home and help win!"

Still holding Sawtell's unresponsive hand, he turned to Miss Bingham. "I'm sure that Ray has had plenty of time to tell stories while I have been away. I'm holding you to that promise of a chat. May I walk home with you?"

The invitation and her prompt assent were heard by all.

They were away before Sawtell had recovered his composure.

Curious eyes and muttered remarks followed their retreat.

That veiled allusion in the speech of the squire pointed those remarks.

And it gave Sergeant Douglass a theme that he approached with embarrassment after the two had walked in silence for some distance up the village street.

"Their tongues are going it now! That's the curse of the town. Even Squire Nile couldn't control his tongue to-night. I'm holding no grudge against your uncle. If I did have any I wouldn't bring it back here; the town is overstocked in that line."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I am not defending Uncle Swinton's dealings in money matters, but—"

"I know! I was looking at you when the squire flung out! I was sorry. Money! It seems to be another curse in this town. I didn't have any—and see what they tried to lay at my door! And all the money your uncle has! What good does it do him?"

"It does him harm," she replied with disarming candor. "He merely piles dollar on dollar for the sake of having money. I have no illusions in regard to Uncle Swinton."

This was comradely agreement, he felt. He uncovered more of his bitterness. "I didn't intend to come back here. I ought not to show up in Canton till I have made good—so good that they can't sneer at me!"

"Barron, isn't this the first step in making good—coming here and taking up a fight that you must finish for your own peace of mind?"

If he had been harboring lingering doubts in regard to his pledge to the Big Boss in Bronze, the last one was cleaned out then! His thoughts were not coherent at that moment. He did not know how to go on with her. He felt that he had picked up his lady's handkerchief and was listed as her knight, but he had not the least idea of how to go about explaining his feelings to the heiress of Swinton Tingley.

To say one word on the great subject that crowded his mind would make him appear like a presuming fool who had forgotten the status of Barron Douglass. He could not even inquire into the troubles which Squire Nile had hinted at; he could not afford to have her misunderstand his interest.

He was back in Canton—and the trammels of Canton bound him!

They walked further without exchanging words. The May moon was bright overhead. From gardens floated the pervasive scent of lilacs. When Douglass spoke again his tone showed that he had begun to feel the softening influence of his surroundings:

"I reckon I'm slow in waking up to the fact that I'm home again in the old town, Miss Nina. I've been in a tough game, and I can't get away from it all at once. If I were myself, as I used to be, I wouldn't have spoken out like that."

"I'm afraid I don't blame you for speaking out. I know what a struggle you have had to make your way. I have been sorry ever since I have known about it."

Their way took them out of the village, and up a long, slow-mounting hill. She hurried in a fashion that suggested a desire to avoid further conversation.

The top of the hill was partially wooded. Back of a row of Norway pines which murmured softly and silently in the night wind there was a house that was almost large enough to be called a mansion. With its imposing outlines silvered by a coating of moonlight, the edifice was rather impressive at first glance. But scrutiny revealed that the big columns of the Corinthian portico were rotting, and that the roof was sagging, and that the moonshine was taking the place of paint. Only one light was visible in the house; it glowed dimly through the cracked fanlight over the front door.

The house behind its pines was several rods from the highway.

The girl halted at the gate. "I'll not trouble you to come further with me," she said, and her tones betrayed nervousness. "I thank you for coming so far."

"I guess I understand," he told her. "I suppose he is just as crabbed as ever about some folks walking home with you."

She was about to reply, not looking at him, her anxious gaze searching the façade of the house as if she feared espionage. All at once she stepped back and clutched his arm with both of her hands.

"Look!" she gasped. "Look!"

He saw nothing to provoke her excitement. "Where?" he demanded.

"They ran across a patch of moonlight behind the trees. There were two of them."

"If you think it's somebody up to mischief I'll chase 'em," he volunteered boldly. "I've developed considerable speed chasing Huns."

But she clung to his arm. "I have seen them before. You must not get into trouble."

Here, however, was his first opportunity to serve in his self-enlistment as her knight!

"If anybody is threatening trouble, it's better for me to be in it than you. I don't like to be nosey about this thing, Nina, but what does it mean, anyway?"

"It can mean only one thing — mischief!" she whispered; her hands on his arm, trembled. "You must not follow them—not now. You must be better prepared."

"And you have seen them before, you say?"

"Nights I have sat by my window, with the lights out. I have seen men prowling under the trees."

She displayed surprise when he chuckled. "Poor mice who think they sniff cheese! They must have come from a long way off not to know that Swinton Tingley has all his money out working for him at twelve per cent and better."

The girl released his arm and stepped back from him. He found it hard to understand what her expression meant: it was evident that she was much disturbed—too much moved to speak just then.

"But if you are trying to handle too much all by yourself, and need a helper, only say the word. In the last two years I have had some good training in the matter of obeying orders without asking questions."

He saluted gravely, with true military snap in the drop of his hand. "I report for orders, captain!"

She did not speak for a long time. She stared steadily at him. He stood very straight and returned her gaze.

This was no longer Barron Douglass, the boy who had gone forth from the narrow life of Canton, she instinctively felt. The moonlight glinted in the clear gray eyes that had seen the welter of a world and still remained serene.

She realized all at once that this man had become dissociated from the jealous prejudices of his town—that the chivalry of the cause that had summoned him from that hollow among the hills must have flavored his character with the spirit of knighthood. At any rate, that belief encouraged her to speak.

"I feel alone—alone and helpless in this thing," she burst out. "I haven't dared to speak to anybody. A little while ago I wanted to say something to you—and I was frightened!"

He did not change his soldier posture of attention. "I have learned to obey—obey without question, in silence, and to keep silent afterward."

"There was nobody in this town I could speak to. I don't trust them. You know how everybody feels about Uncle Swinton's money!"

"I'm afraid I do."

"But you are not like the rest—not now," she assured him, her eyes brilliant, her tone tremulous, her whole demeanor revealing her new and inspired estimation of him. "There is something—somehow—"

He did not presume to break upon the silence that followed. She found his self-restraint more convincing than speech as exposition of the new character he had brought back from across the seas.

"I know I can trust you. I need help, somebody who is not like the others in this town. I feel that you are generous enough to forget what my uncle has been in the case of your folks."

"I have learned great lessons in the last two years," he returned quietly.

She glanced all about, and came close to him. "You have just said that his money is out working for him. No! He has called it home. He has dunned and he

has squeezed, has persecuted and prosecuted, and has foreclosed. And that money, thousands upon thousands of dollars, is there in the house."

Before he had time to rebuke an ugly reflection, Sergeant Douglass was resentfully remembering another occasion on which he had been made the sole confidant in a money matter, to his ruination, almost!

But he shook himself away from these thoughts.

"Gee!" He gave a bit of a whistle. "No wonder the mice are prowling!"

"It's so that he won't have to pay taxes—he has hidden his money even though it can't draw interest any longer. He won't let the bank have it—he says the banks blab to the government."

"And that hidden money has evidently blabbed enough so that somebody is trailing it."

"I have said nothing to a living soul—I have not dared to till now," she said.

"At any rate, his grabbing it back, the way he has gone about it, has started enough of a row to put folks wise. I understand! I reckon you find that living in that house these times is a good deal like sitting on a bomb with the fuse sizzling. It *is* dangerous!"

"He has loaded up an old Revolutionary fusee for protection."

"Too mean to buy a modern repeater, eh!" he blurted. "Excuse that remark," he went on contritely. "But according to what I know about those old rusty fusees, it's fifty-fifty who's in most danger when they're fired—the man in front of the muzzle or the man who pulls the trigger. I should think Swinton Tingley would have a little judgment left."

"He seems to have lost his good sense since that money has been in the house," declared the girl, showing exasperation. "He brags to me how nobody can get it away from him. He works himself up into a fury about it. His whole nature seems to be changed since he has had it where he can count it over every little while. I hear strange noises in the night—and it's my uncle, walking around the house and muttering about his money. I can't be answerable for my nerves much longer."

"That man should be put under guardianship as a lunatic," Sergeant Douglass snapped out. "Why don't you let me open the matter up to Squire Nile so that something can be done in a legal way to protect your uncle and his money?"

"It would be awful—awful—what would happen," gasped Nina. "You must know how even the mere mention of law and lawyers has made him rave in the past."

"It couldn't make him much crazier than he seems to be right now," urged the young man. "If he keeps on this way he's going to lose that money and maybe his life in the bargain. And, considering how he has put the screws to men, it may be hard to get a jury in this county to convict the robbers," he added with bitterness.

"Don't say anything about it just yet," pleaded the girl. "I'll talk with you again. Perhaps you can give me courage to do the right thing."

Douglass's face revealed that the prospect of a future conference was far from displeasing.

"At any rate, in the mean time, I can be thinking over how you may take measures for your own protection," he said. "I don't mean to add to your fears, but—"

"You can scarcely do that! I don't sleep or eat, as it is."

She was on the inner side of the gate. He came through and tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow. "Come, I'll see you to the door!"

"There's no need. I'm used to going about alone."

"You're afraid he'll see me coming home with you! That's it, isn't it?" demanded the sergeant bluntly.

"He isn't in a reasonable frame of mind about anything these days," she admitted.

"I'd hate to make any more trouble for you. If he sees us and says anything I'll lay it all to my own cheekiness. Come! It's better to run the risk of his tongue than the other risks that may be outside, here!"

She stooped beside the porch, reached under the lattice-work, and secured a large, old-fashioned key.

Sergeant Douglass waited; he wanted to make sure that she was safely within.

But the door refused to open after she had clacked back the rusty tongue of the lock.

"He has never done this before when I have been to the village on an evening," she said in low tones. "It is bolted inside."

"Who is it?" demanded a harsh voice within. "Speak up!"

"It's Nina."

"There's a man with you. I saw him coming. Who is he?"

Sergeant Douglass relieved her embarrassment. He announced his identity.

"What right have you to be here?"

"I walked home with Miss Bingham because she was alone and it is late."

The bolt inside screaked; the door was flung open.

Swinton Tingley stood there with his fusee across his arm; the prodigiously long barrel barred the doorway from side to side. In length and lack of girth Tingley matched the fusee's barrel to some degree. His gauntness was striking. His white hair, roached, made him seem very tall. "Late! It's too late for a girl to be gadding."

"If there's any blame, put it on me," pleaded the young man. "I asked to be allowed to walk home with her."

"Heh!" sneered the old man. "Back here to practice on decent girls with the devilishness you learned over there among the foreign heathen! Swaggering with your monkey cap! Go mix with your pack of murderers! Off with you!"

When he brandished the gun, Nina hurried through the doorway and tried to put her palm across her uncle's lips.

Sergeant Douglass pulled off his cap. "Good night," Miss Nina. We seem to be fellow sufferers in this injustice."

"Injustice!" squalled Tingley. "I should think the word would scald your tongue. Who has saddled this country's taxpayers with a debt that can never be paid? Who has killed business and raised prices? Who has tipped everything sensible upside down. It's you and your kind of bloody, blustering fools. And you're swelling around in those jimcrack duds, parading the badge of your shame! A State's prison suit is a credit beside that!"

He spat venomously and viciously, and slammed the heavy door so violently that glass shivered and tinkled from the fanlight overhead.

"I seem to have struck an objector without the conscientiousness," said young Douglass to himself, turning from the Tingley door. "The more I hear from some men, the more I respect Benedict Arnold; he did do a lot for his country until he stubbed his toe."

On his way to the gate he shot sharp glances among the pines, but he saw no signs of prowlers.

In the highway he stopped and faced the old mansion.

"Welcome, hero!" he said.

It was a sarcastic quotation from the banner that had faced him in the town hall.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SOME JOUNCES IN THE OLD RUT.

DOUGLASS, in front of the mirror in his narrow bedroom at Mrs. Bristow's, the next morning, was not wholly convinced that the three-year-old summer suit would do, but he made up his mind that it would have to.

Figuring on how far his modest savings would go, he concluded that he would stick exclusively to reading law and would let the paper mill struggle along without him. At twenty-four, a fellow who plans on a profession must stop marking time!

Hanging onto the old suit should be his first essay in thriftiness. Its shoulders pinched and the coat drew in ridges across his chest when he tried to button the garment. He had not fully realized till then what a seventy-five pound kit and setting-up exercises had done for him.

He was obliged to wait for a quarter of an hour outside the office door, till Squire Nile showed up—and the squire was an early bird, at that!

"Spite of what you said, I thought you'd take a few days to look around," ventured the old lawyer, peering for the keyhole in the dim corridor.

"I have done enough looking around to

last me for some time, sir. From now on I'm spending my hours like I'm spending my dollars, looking for real value from every second and every cent."

The squire, standing by his littered table and stuffing tobacco into a clay pipe for his after-breakfast puff, surveyed the first movements of his law student with quizzical squint. One might naturally expect a little wobbling before the wheels of past habit dropped into the old rut.

But young Douglass did not waste a motion.

He hung up his hat on the way to a bookcase, took down a volume and spatted the dust from it, pulled a chair to the window and seated himself. He did not scuff the pages, hunting for his place. He opened the volume at a certain page as if he had just laid the book down a moment before.

"Well, by cracky," exploded the mentor, "war doesn't seem to have dulled your rememberer much!"

"Blackstone on 'Circumstantial Evidence'—here's where I left off. I was especially interested in how far circumstantial evidence could go—for a good reason, as you remember, sir!"

"Many a time it has tightened the noose and shot the drop," declared the squire, turning away to hunt for a match.

Young Douglass, no longer under surveillance, looked hard at an object between the pages to which he had opened. It was one of those postage stamp sized photographs that street operators shoot on carnival days; he and Nina Bingham had posed one day in a spirit of jest when the circus was in town.

"Right where I left you!" he whispered. He smiled down upon the laughing face as if that statement meant much.

He leaned back and went on with his reading.

The squire concealed himself in a smoke-cloud; from the heart of it sounded the scratching of a busy pen.

And in those familiar surroundings, it seemed to Sergeant Douglass that the shock and crash, the bellow and blatter, the blood and the fury of war were all the visions of a troubled night, and that this peace to which he had come back was the sane and blessed reality that had never been disturbed.

But he was not wholly diligent in his concentration on what the sapient Blackstone had to say on circumstantial evidence. Every now and then he flipped back the pages and gazed on the girl's radiant face.

He remembered his last glimpse of that face at the door of the Tingley house the night before; the contrast was pathetic, and stirred his pity.

When he first laid eyes on her at the railroad station he had missed the old spirit that had animated her features. He felt that the burden of these new anxieties were proving too heavy for her. Her face haunted him all the day.

Who were the skulkers who seemed to threaten old Tingley's hoard? Douglass had not seen their shadows, but he was not doubting Nina's affirmation or ascribing her fears to delusion. Robbers, once inside, would be careless of human life—man's or girl's.

As one who had come to know much about firearms, Douglass placed little dependence on that old fusee. And he knew that Tingley would guard threatened money first, last, and all the time, no matter what might happen to a niece.

His reflections and his fears bore fruit to this extent; he resolved that the girl should not be left, unprotected, to her danger and her fears.

In his new determination he made no account of his reception at the hands of the old man the night before; he was not deterred by any reflections as to what might happen to him if he ventured to intrude at the Tingley house again. A man who had forced his way into a German machine-gun nest could not be expected to stand back and respect the foibles of a sour old money fanatic who was blindly risking the safety of a helpless girl.

Therefore, in the late afternoon, the law student slapped Blackstone shut and busied himself with affairs of more vital personal interest.

He went across to Dustin's hardware store and bought an automatic revolver and cartridges to match.

"Stocking up for another war?" inquired Dustin humorously, while he wrapped the purchase.

"Maybe."

"I suppose you've got so used to killing off a few critters before breakfast every day that you can't break the habit all at once."

"Something like that!" admitted Sergeant Douglass, gravely carrying on the jest.

"Well, war does harden a man, and blood ain't of any more account than broth," averred Mr. Dustin. "Not after he has waded in blood!"

Then he snapped an ejaculation of impatience and began to unwrap the parcel. "Talking with a savage soldier took my mind off my business. There's a State law that says a dealer must take down the number of any firearm and name of buyer. Every fifteen minutes they pass some new law to bother a man that's in business."

He made the requisite record, and rewrapped the revolver and ammunition, continuing to grumble about new laws.

"That's a good and sensible law, all right," declared the student, fresh from the pages of Blackstone. "Anything that will have the effect of bracing circumstantial evidence in the case of a crime ought to be provided for by legislation."

That evening he walked up the long hill. Folks who met him noted the parcel he carried, and grinned after he passed. It resembled the conventional box of chocolates. In the estimation of Canton a parcel of that sort indicated pursuit of maid by man. There was gossip in the loafing places that evening regarding the new up-and-coming spirit showed by Sergeant Douglass. "That has been the war cry they've been hearing all the time over across—'Go and get 'em!'" observed one commentator. "It ain't any wonder that it's ringing in his ears now that he has got back home."

"Well, Swint Tingley's old tongue can do a little ear-ringing, too," affirmed an old man, who seemed to speak from bitter experience. "And he can make: 'Get out!' sound a good deal louder than: 'Go get 'em!'"

It was still light, with the hour of grace allowed by law to the twilight's flush, when Douglass reached the Tingley gate. He walked through and marched straight for the door. He was not conscious of exhibiting bravado. It seemed to him that he was doing a perfectly natural and friendly office. He was not admitting to himself that he was a suitor.

He pulled at the porcelain knob and heard the bell jangle.

Nina opened to him so promptly that he was sure that she had seen him coming. But her face revealed hesitation and discomposure; she did not invite him to come in. She glanced at the little parcel in his hand and exhibited more embarrassment, for the tableau he presented was that of the conventional Canton beau, come to pay court.

He did not know just what to say after his "Good evening!" even in her troubled looks he found a welcome, but she did not put it into words.

Swinton Tingley relieved the situation, though not in generous fashion. He came striding down the hallway and stepped in front of the girl at the door. "I told you last night to keep away from here."

"No, you didn't," retorted the sergeant bluntly.

"You must have grown mighty thick-headed since you've been away soldiering! You go away from here, and you stay away. Understand that?"

"I heard, thank you!"

"Then go!" The old man shouted so loudly that his tones carried far on the breathless May evening.

A casual passer along the highway pulled up his horse and stuck his face out past the spreaders of the buggy-top, displaying great interest. Douglass was instantly alarmed. He knew Canton all too well. That single gossip microbe in the highway could breed infinite mischief. Impulsively, he pushed Tingley back into the hallway and kicked the door shut with thrusting heel.

"I have an errand here, sir, and it's private. I beg your pardon for bolting in as I just did, but I don't want my business discussed before a gallery."

"What business?" rasped old Tingley, clicking his yellowed teeth ferociously.

That question was pretty much of a poser. The young man knew he could not mention what Nina had revealed. He could hardly tell the old miser that the mission was to assist in protecting hidden treasure and a niece; Tingley's attitude toward outsiders indicated that he did not feel that he needed any assistance.

Douglass was silent, and that silence provoked the old man still more. He showed increasing excitement that soon became a sort of frenzy. Under cover of his shouts and threats, Nina found opportunity to entreat Douglass to go away.

"He has been growing worse ever since the money has been in the house, as I told you," she said hurriedly, in low tones. "But I have never seen him give way like this. There's no knowing what he may do."

Tingley thrust forth his flail-like arms and pushed the young folks apart. "I'll have no lally-gagging under my nose. You can't come playing your love game around this girl, you young whelp!"

"I'm not trying to," protested Douglass, his indignation making him a bit too emphatic; the girl turned away from him.

"You have been fooling away your time, chasing around in Europe with the blood and thunder wasters, who have run this country into debt, and all for nothing. You have come back a pauper and think you're going to get my money."

"I don't want your cursed money," barked Douglass, showing ire of his own. "It's a rotten mess, the kind of money you have piled up." He snapped scornful fingers under Tingley's nose and turned to Nina.

"Now that I'm in here—and I'm sorry I was obliged to come this way—I want to attend to my errand. I hope you won't think it's a piece of foolishness." He lowered his tone. "I don't mean to make any trouble for you by letting on that you have talked to me about—" he paused significantly.

"I'm sorry I told you of my troubles. Not because I doubt your discretion," she hastened to add. "But it's subjecting you to this!" A side nod of her head, to indicate the vociferous uncle, explained her reference.

Tingley was exhibiting fresh fury; he was excluded from a secret that the two seemed to be sharing. He pushed them asunder once more. Muttering resentful words, young Douglass doubled his fist and showed signs of unleashing his self-repression.

Then the bell over their heads pealed loudly on its spiral spring and its tones died away in a jingling, tinkling diminuendo.

After a moment, old Tingley strode to the door. He growled threats and flung open the portal with an air as if he intended to pounce on the intruder.

Douglass seized the opportunity when the uncle's back was turned. He pushed the packet into her hands. It's something for your protection! Don't be afraid to use it if danger ever threatens."

She hastily dropped the packet into the drawer of the hall stand and faced the open door.

An elderly gentleman, with a rosy face set like a medallion in a frame of white whiskers and hair, stood on the porch. He smiled into the contorted countenance of Tingley. "Well, Swinton," he protested amiably, "if you feel anyways as bad as you look, I guess the family physician has timed his call about right!"

He gently patted Nina's flushed cheek. He stuck out a hand to Barron Douglass after a moment's hesitation. "Sorry I couldn't be at the hall last evening to join in the grand affair. But whilst they were welcoming you home I was welcoming a little shaver into the world."

Douglass tightened his lips when he took the extended hand. He was finding it hard to disguise his opinion of Dr. Abner Sawtell.

The doctor glanced from face to face, eyes narrowed in shrewd appraisal. "Some trouble here? Am I diagnosing correctly?" he inquired blandly.

"That scalawag has forced his way into my house," stormed Tingley. "He has come back to Canton to tramp rough-shod over any and all. That's what he learned where he has been! To meddle! That's what the whole war was—only meddling in other folks' business!"

"Well, well, the war's over—let's not start another one," chided Dr. Sawtell, in an irritable manner.

"I'm not here to make any trouble," protested Douglass.

"Of course not! Certainly not!"

But this attempt at mediation only whetted Tingley's rage—a rage that seemed senseless in its violence.

"I know what he's here for! He can't fool me with his lies. I won't let him fool my niece or you, doctor. You come along with me!" He started away, waving his arms wildly. "I'm going to put him on record so that he can't do the same thing twice in this town! You know what I can show him."

"He seems quite beside himself," said the doctor, tapping forefinger judicially upon his upper lip, exhibiting professional concern for his patient. "He has been in a decidedly nervous state recently. I'm sorry to find his condition aggravated. Have you seen to it that he has taken the medicine regularly, Nina? He needs that sedative."

"He is stubborn, doctor. I have tried to make him take the doses as you ordered. But he says that it's using up expensive medicine too fast."

Dr. Sawtell clucked expostulation. "Money, money! Oh, money!"

Old Tingley had rushed away, into a room that opened from the hall. He returned and propped himself against the door-jambs with his thin arms, projecting his head into the hallway.

"Yes, money! I'll show him up. I've got you now for a witness, Dr. Sawtell. You're the best witness I can have in this case. I'll prove what he's here for! Come, I tell you! It's what I have told you about!"

He backed away through the door.

Dr. Sawtell blinked under Nina's stare.

"Do you know?" she asked.

"He has insisted on telling me. I'm sorry because I allowed him to do so. Some secrets are dangerous." The doctor showed discomposure when he glanced into Douglass's scowl.

"Come along!" bawled Tingley from within.

The doctor obeyed the summons and walked into the room.

After a little hesitation, staring at the door that was invitingly open, Douglass turned to Nina. "Since your uncle seems to be so positive about what I'm here for, I can rightfully claim personal interest in the matter, I suppose. I think I'd better get a little information on the subject."

He bowed the niece ahead of him into the room.

The room was panelled high with dark wainscoting, carved in deep lines. The wall to which Tingley marched apparently had not been disturbed by any perforations, but when the old man banged his fist upon the panelling, a section of the woodwork dropped down like the tailboard of a cart. He pulled out a small, round trunk, covered with calf hide on which the brindled hair had been left. He slammed the trunk down upon a table and fumbled at the lock.

"Swinton! Now, Swinton, old friend! Listen a moment!" pleaded Dr. Sawtell. "You are letting anger run away with your good judgment."

"I've got an honest witness, and I'll show up this renegade!"

"I don't seek any responsibility of the sort," protested the doctor. "You're exposing your secrets, and in your sane senses you'll be sorry!"

"No, it's good judgment, seeing what kind of a blackleg has come back into this town. I'm doing what you ought to have done, to make yourself safe."

"I never accused this young man," bleated the doctor. "But I was compelled to state all the facts."

"You did! You didn't leave any out—not where I was concerned!" There was bite in Douglass's tone.

"Swinton, it's dangerous to show—"

But Tingley had banged back the cover of the trunk. The receptacle was stuffed to the lid with paper money, tied neatly in packets. He rooted his hands into the treasure and tossed handful after handful of the bills upon the table. Every now and then he drove his fist down on the pile that he had heaped. "That's what he wants. His mouth is watering for it. By hook or crook—anyway! He is trying to work his

devilish tricks with my niece, because he thinks the money goes with her."

"You're a confounded old liar!" stated young Mr. Douglass with great alacrity. "Dr. Sawtell, if you have any influence over that man, make him shut his mouth. I have endured about enough!"

But Dr. Sawtell was wholly absorbed by the spectacle the heaped packets of money afforded. Dull red replaced the pink of his cheeks; his eyes shone, his mouth was open. "Swinton," he gasped, "put it back—put it out of sight—quick. It's wrong to place temptation before—before"—he blurted the last words violently—"before the young! One never knows—never knows," he babbled, and kept reiterating the words in a sort of foolish way.

"He wants it," insisted the miser. "Others want it—they all want it, but they haven't had the brazen cheek to force their way into my house—to make love to my niece under my nose. Remember, Dr. Sawtell! Remember!"

The young man turned his back upon a tableau that, if his face truthfully expressed his feelings, disgusted him. His countenance cleared a bit when he looked at Nina Bingham, and he went to her. "There's one thing money is good for!" he said. "It's taking up his whole attention while I can say a word to you. Your uncle ought to be taken care of—somehow!"

She queried anxiously with her eyes.

"It needs a wiser head than mine. There must be some way to handle a thing like this by law. If he'll parade his money before me, he'll be crazy enough pretty soon to run out in the highway and shake it under folks' noses. A sight like that doesn't have a very good effect on human nature! Look at Dr. Sawtell!"

Tingley was packing the money back into the trunk; the doctor had moved close to the table; his outspread fingers were twitching nervously.

"Giving that revolver to you has only added to your uneasiness, I'm afraid," continued Douglass. "Why don't you come to the office and ask Squire Nile for advice?"

"Perhaps I'll only be adding more trouble," she lamented.

"The office of an honest lawyer is as safe as a confessional. You have the right to take steps in a matter like this."

"Perhaps—I'll think it over—I'll not promise!" Her uncle was locking the hair trunk and she left the sergeant's side, fearing to provoke more insults.

The miser propped his attenuated arms akimbo on the closed trunk and leaned over it, his lips parted in a grimace like the grin of an angry cat.

"You'd like to paw into it and grab out of it, wouldn't you? You'll stay awake tonight and hanker, hey?"

The sergeant advanced two steps and raised his fist. "If I knew just which wad you gouged out of my poor old father, I'd grab, all right! As for the rest of the sculch—" he snapped contemptuous fingers and turned away.

"You heard him, Dr. Sawtell—he'd like to grab!" squealed old Tingley.

"Guard your tongue!" The doctor stammered his warning, and looked past Douglass. "Rash words may come back to plague you!"

"Like chickens come home to roost, eh?" queried the young man, giving Nina a bit of a smile as he passed her on his way to the door. "Well, I'll eat the chickens, but I won't eat the words!"

In the hallway, hidden from the eyes of the two men, he glanced back at the girl. She understood the expression on his face and his parting gesture; he was emphasizing his appeal that she should seek good advice.

**(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)**

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## TRIUMPH

THE race is won! As victor I am hailed
With deafening cheers from eager throats; and yet
More glad the victory, could I forget
The strained, white faces of the ones that failed.

*Owen E. McGillicuddy.*

# Curin' Mike Regan

by Raymond J. Brown

IF I pick up any more side lines I'll have to be incorporatin' myself. Honest to Jerry, it's gettin' fierce! As chief operative, sup'rintendent, head bookkeeper, first broom and bouncer for the Giles Confidential Detective Agency, I was almost busy enough for a guy that ain't got many ambitions over payin' his rent regular and havin' another suit to wear on Sundays. Then old Giles had to start me off collectin' bad debts.

Fair enough; I could manage that too, and the pickin's was passable. But listen to this if you don't think there's a yelp due from my thrushlike throat—I've just got through managin' a prize-fighter. Not only that, but I've been wanderin' around, talkin' with a Wilkie Bard accent and sinkin' my identity of Joe Conner, sleuth, in a homespun suit and an automobile cap and callin' myself Alf Hayes of Melbourne, Orstrylia, a bloomin', blightin', sportin' toff.

In a w'y, old deah, it's me own bally fault at that. Hear ye: A fat bird with an orange-colored suit, a plum-colored hat, a grape-colored face and more diamonds than Pershing has medals slips into the office one afternoon like a rainbow after a summer storm. He indicts himself as William C. Cassidy and pours out a tale of intense human interest, havin' as its point the fact that a guy named Isidore Levinsky had jipped him for a couple of hundred bucks in a real estate deal. We—meanin' the agency, meanin' me—are to get it back.

All went smooth enough until Cassidy mentioned the fact that he'd just took a trip to Philly with a bird named Mike Regan. Then I had him tabbed. He was Bill Cassidy—*the* Bill Cassidy—you know, the guy that manages Young Gibbons, Tony Bruno, Slim Smith and, of course, Mike Regan. The Wonder Worker they call him in the newspapers on account of his knack of pickin' up preliminary fighters and makin' near champs out of them in a couple of months.

"Well, well, well!" I exclaim, noddin' and smilin' by way of apology for the thoughts I'd entertained about his wardrobe. "So you're that William Cassidy? I ought to have known you right away! Sure, I ought! Why, I've seen your boys fight time and time again. I've seen Mike Regan fight only a month—"

"You're a liar!" butts in Cassidy.

"I'm— I'm—" I stutter, gettin' ready for a swing at him if he repeats it.

"You're— oh, I don't mean just that!" he grins. "I mean you're— er— mistaken when you've seen Regan fight. He don't fight— the big stiff! There ain't a fight in him, and there never was. He's a false alarm; a yeller, quittin' hound! That's what he is. He's— aha, the big dud! It sickens me to think of him even! I wish—"

"Say, wait a minute!" I request. "I don't think you got me. I'm talkin' about Mike Regan—the Caveman, as they call him on the sport pages. I mean the guy who—"

"I know. I know," Cassidy kind of wails. "That's the daisy I'm talkin' about

too. A thick-skulled mut! A white-livered hound! Two hundred pounds of mush!"

"But his record!" I object. "I've read—"

"Ah, there you got it!" exclaims Cassidy. "You've 'read.' Sure, you've read! That's the kind of a fighter he is—a newspaper champion. I'm the guy that fought all his fights for him—fought 'em on the sportin' pages. I've ballyhooed and press-agented that bird until he almost believes himself that he could lick Jeffries in his prime; believes it, that is, until the time comes for him to go up against some fightin' man of his own weight, and then—bla! Why, that guy's idea of a deadly weepon is the flag of truce! He's the lad that learned the Germans how to say 'Kamerad'! He's the inventor of 'I give up'! Why the big lunk wouldn't fight Mary's little lamb—unless you give him an ax and a couple of guy's to help him!"

"But I thought—" I start to say.

"You got nothin' on me, brother!" Cassidy assures me. I 'thought' myself. That's why Mike Regan is known to-day outside of the dirty little mill town where I found him. But you always want to play thoughts for a place when deeds is in the same race! The big bum!" shouts Cassidy, screwin' up his purple face till I wondered whether he was liable to bite me.

Cassidy's forgot all about the two hundred seeds which had brought him to the office. So had I for that matter. I been goin' to the bouts for years, and to hear his own manager knock a guy that I thought was a future champion of the world sure was interestin'.

"But, listen, squire," I say, "if this here Regan is as much of a bum as you say, how is it that you've been hangin' on to him for—"

"For the same reason that a guy hangs on to a business that's goin' bankrupt," he tells me. "I've been hopin' somethin' might happen to give me a chance of breakin' even on my dealin's with Regan. But that's all off; there's no more chance. He's through! I've measured him for the can, and all I need is the string to tie it to him with."

"But how—"

"Listen," says Cassidy. "About eighteen months ago I went to an amateur boxin' show in a place called Milltown, Pa. I might as well tell you the truth—I went there to see how Mike Regan shaped up. I'd been tipped off about him by Fred Fox, the Philly sportin' writer. Well, Mike, as the heavyweight champ of the steel mills, meets a fat Polack, who's carryin' the money of the boys from the minin' district near by. When I see Mike I nearly faint—he's the roughest lookin' plug-ugly I ever set my eyes on, and I been in the boxin' game for twenty years.

"You've seen him, so you know—all hairy, with a shape like a piano-mover and the footwork of a soft shoe dancer. The minute he hopped over the ropes I says to myself, I says: 'Bill, that guy's intended to be sprung on the sportin' editors as the Caveman. It don't make no difference whether he can fight or not; his shape carries him through.' As I'm so thinkin', the gong sounds. I look up to give Mike's ring etiquette the once over, and I'm just in time to see the referee beginnin' the count over the Polack. Mike had clipped him once—just once. Enough! The Polack was out for two weeks! That decided me. I was Mike's manager before he had his gloves off.

"Well, I fitted him out with two hundred bucks worth of garments, had him mugged, got a newspaper friend to bat out some write-ups and took Mike callin' on the sports writers. Did they fall? You said it! One glance into Mike's ferocious mush and they were ready to call in a notary and swear he could lick the world. They started yelpin' for photographs, dropped paper in their typewriters and Mike went over with a bang! A great start—if I do say it who made it."

Cassidy paused, and mades several gestures which, the movies have learned everybody, mean "all is lost."

"The promoters," he says, after takin' a long breath, "fell with everybody else. They started to offer money to have Mike appear in their clubs. I finally matched him with a broken-winded shriveled-up old war horse named Andy Carr who'd been licked by every fighter in the world except

those who died before he began his career. Some fight! I ain't got over cheerin' yet because it was held far enough away to keep the New York sports writers from attendin'.

"Andy, who needed only a wheel-chair and a blanket to make him look like the oldest survivor of the Battle of Gettysburg, hobbled into the ring and started making motions like a woman chasin' flies. Mike, who I expected to flatten old Andy in a blow and who had the poor old wreck scared to death, backed away like he would from in front of the Empire State Express. At last Andy got courage enough to tap Mike on the nose. It must have hurt some, because Mike got mad. He swung a wild one from the heel, caught old Andy on the chin and the battle was over. In the record book it looked great—a one-round knock-out in his first professional fight—but I'm tellin' you it was the saddest exhibition of the manly art of self-defense that yours truly ever witnessed!

"You could hear me across two counties bawlin' Mike out after that awful showin'. He took all I had to say meek as a guy that's been caught robbin' poor boxes.

"'What was the matter with you?' I asked him at last. 'Why didn't you go after that guy from the bell?'

"'Aw,' he says, hangin' his head, 'he's a perfessional fighter.'

"I nearly fainted.

"'What the devil are you?' I managed to ask him at last.

"He couldn't tell me.

"'Ain't you a professional, too?' I asked him.

"And after a while I managed to drag his story out of him. Get it and see if it don't top anything you ever heard!

"It seems about four years before I discovered Mike, when he was a weak little boy of eighteen, standin' only six feet tall and weighin' only a hundred and ninety-six, Matty Hughes, the old-time heavyweight, visited Milltown with a burleycue show. Matty was workin' the old gag of offerin' fifty bucks to any local guy who could stay four rounds with him. Mike had just branched out as a knuckle-pusher in the steel mill, and that fifty looked like awful soft dough to him. He went to the theater, hopped over the footlights as soon as the announcement was made—and when they brought him to after Matty Hughes walloped him, the burleycue show was just about finishin' its engagement in the next town.

"Well, you'd think a kid of eighteen who was knockin' out his shop mates as quick as they got big enough to stand up to him would forget a little thing like the slam on the chin Matty Hughes handed him. Not Mike, though! Then and there he got an idea that a professional pug was a natural-born cross between a machine-gun and a batterin' ram. The memory of Matty Hughes's pile-driver right clings to him like the skin to an apple. Against an amateur pug Mike shapes up like a warship alongside of a coal barge. The mere fact that another bird has been battlin' professional, though, gives him a ninety per cent bulge on Mike before they get into the ring. The feller he's fightin' may be the worse specimen of a pork and beaner that ever rubbed rosin on his shoes, but that makes no difference—Mike pictures him as another edition of Matty Hughes and begins lookin' around for a soft place to lay himself. I've lectured the bum, I've kidded him, I've threatened him, I've had a dozen old-time battlers give him an earful; but nothin' seems to help him. He's got the idea that he's an amateur and that professional mitt-slingers is out of his class."

"But, say," I remark, "Mike's record is fair. He's got a string of knockouts to his credit. I never heard of him losin' a fight."

"That's bunk, I tell you!" says Cassidy seriouslike. "The fellers he's licked are bums—one and all. Now, he can't go on fightin' bums forever. I got to stack him up against a real pug soon—or I would if I wasn't goin' to can him—and I'll tell you, son, that the minute Mike Regan gets into the ring with a regular—"

"But," I object, "the fact that these guys Mike's licked are bums, as you call 'em, don't explain how he managed to flatten 'em. If he runs away from a professional fighter like you say, how is it that—"

"Listen," says Cassidy. "Mike's got

two or three things in his favor. He ain't got the brains of a chimpanzee. He's a fast, clever boxer. He's got a wallop like a fireman's ax. And he's got the worst temper of any guy in the world."

I'm puzzled all right. If these assets of Mike Regan didn't make him a fighter, I don't know what would; which is what I told Cassidy.

"He's been lucky," says Cassidy, explainin'. "The retreat he's beat at the sound of every gong he's heard has been taken by the fans and sport writers for what they call ring generalship. It's been just plain yellerness, but he's got by with it. Also, in practically every fight, he's been lucky enough to have the other guy hit him a couple of—"

"Lucky enough!" I exclaim.

"Sure," grins Cassidy. "The other guy's hurt him, and it's made him mad—mad enough to forget he's scared and to wallop out and pulverize the bird in front of him. He can hit all right. In fact, I'm almost willin' to bet he can lick any guy he's got nerve enough to hit."

"Well, what's the matter with him then?" I ask. "I don't see why you'd want to get rid of a pug that can do what you say Regan can."

"Son," says Cassidy, "Bill Cassidy ain't specializin' on third raters, and the guy that won't fight until he's hurt ain't even a third rater. He's a dog. A champ, or a feller that can get a nod out of a champ when they pass on the street, has got to have what Mike Regan ain't got—guts. He's got to be able to carry the fight to the other feller; he can't wait until the other feller carries it to him. If he does, it's only a question of time when he goes up against a guy who'll knock him into the sewer with the first wallop he lands. There ain't no money, there ain't even good sport, in handlin' a bird like that. That's why I'm tyin' the can to Mike Regan, and I don't care who knows it."

I sit there thinkin' for a few minutes. Then I ask Cassidy:

"But ain't there no curin' Mike? Ain't there no way of makin' a battler out of him? It seems to me a guy that can box and can hit ought—"

"The difference between Mike Regan and a fighter," says Cassidy, "is the difference between a thoroughbred horse and one that's pullin' a cart. There's some things a guy ain't born with that can be put into him—book learnin' and things like that; but the bird that ain't got heart—for him blooie! He may make a first-class sock salesman, but you can't make a pug out of him."

"But this Regan," I say, "he just seems to be sufferin' from a mistaken idea. Prob'ly if he went up against this Matty Hughes now—"

"—he'd drop dead before he got into the ring!" Cassidy butts in.

"Maybe not," I say.

"Ahr, what d'you know about it?"

"Not much," I admit, thinkin', "but it seems to me — where is this Matty Hughes?" I ask suddenlike.

"Australia," says Cassidy. "He went down there to fight and stayed to raise sheep."

"Ain't there any chance of matchin' him up with Mike again?"

"About as much chance as there'd be of matchin' Mike with the ghost of Jem Mace! Matty's made a fortune. You couldn't get him into the ring with a derrick."

"But there must be some guy in Australia that Matty fought," I suggest.

"What're you gettin' at?" asks Cassidy, lookin' interested.

"I was just thinkin'," I say, "that if Mike Regan could lick Matty Hughes, or some guy Matty licked, it might change his ideas on the subject of professional battlers."

"It might," nods Cassidy.

"Well, why don't you—"

"What—go to Australia!" yelps Cassidy. "Pay that big bum's fare half-way around the world—just on a chance! You're crazy!"

"You needn't go to Australia," I say.

"No! I suppose I can bring Australia here!" laughs Cassidy sarcasticlike.

"You could bring a fighter from Australia."

"Yeh. And I could bring one from the Cape of Good Hope! Who's to pay his expenses? Who's to guarantee his engage-

ments when he gets here? Huh! People don't sail across no seven seas—not unless they know there's gold mines or somethin' at the other end of the trip."

"Ain't there no Australian fighters in the country now?"

"Not that I know of, and even if there was, I don't know as I'd care to stack Mike Regan up against them."

"Why not?"

"A guy that comes all the way from Australia to the United States to fight must think he's some battler. A feller that's good enough to make that trip could beat Mike in a punch. I *know* it."

I do a little more thinkin'. The inside doin's of the prize ring is a little off of my beat, although, with the forty-eleven side lines I'm carryin', I'm believin' there may be somethin' that's like what the newspapers call the fistic arena. All of a sudden I'm up out of my chair and I've got Cassidy by the shoulder. I've got an idea!

"Listen, professor!" I yelp at him. "I'm the kind of a guy that don't believe in droppin' nothin' without a thorough test, and I like to see everybody else like that too. What you've told me about Mike Regan makes me think there may be more to him than you believe. The one thing that seems to be the matter with him is a streak of—let's call it yeller—that was put into him by a blow from the fist of a bird named Matty Hughes. All right, then—get that streak out of him and Mike's a fighter."

"You said that before," objects Cassidy.

"I know," I admit, "but not in the same words. Listen: The trouble with Mike Regan is all in his bean; his imagination is runnin' wild. Very well. All you got to do to put Mike's imagination back on the track again is to prove to him that he's a better man than Matty Hughes was in his prime."

"Why not prove that he's a better man than John L. Sullivan?" suggested Cassidy in a nasty way.

I let that pass.

"Now, how are we to do it?"

"Where d'you get that 'we' stuff?" questions Cassidy.

"Right from headquarters," I tell him. "It's my idea, and I'm in on the gate receipts—but I'll talk to you about that later. As I said—how are we to do it? Just like this," I tell him quicklike to ward off any more sarcastic remarks from him. "We get a pug—any pug at all, a bum if possible. We tell Mike Regan he's Joe White, or Jim Black—anybody at all—but that he's from Australia where he licked Matty Hughes three times—in a punch."

"The news would drive Regan to suicide," says Cassidy, although I can see he's listenin' interested.

"We tell Mike further that he's heard about what Matty Hughes done that night in the burleycue theayter. I don't suppose that story's general property, is it?"

"No," says Cassidy.

"Good!" I nod. "Well, we continue fillin' Mike up to the effect that this Australian bearcat has come here with the single and sole intention of gettin' a wallop at one Mike Regan the Caveman. Havin' licked Matty Hughes he's certain he can lick the guy Matty Hughes licked—to wit, Regan. A bad idea—what?"

"You mean, of course," says Cassidy, "that we're to frame it in some way for Regan to lick this bird?"

"Go up to the head of the class," I bid him.

"The idea bein' that when Mike plasters this fake Australian the memory of Matty Hughes will depart from what might be called his brain?"

"You ain't no fight manager," I tell him, "you're a mind-reader."

"H-m," comments Cassidy. "And where did you propose havin' this battle take place?"

"Well," I say grinnin', "I was thinkin' of Alaska, but I also figgered Siam might be a good place, or, if not that, maybe the roof of the Woolworth Buildin'. What in blazes difference does it make?" I ask him.

"Well," he says, eyin' me close, "I ain't in business for my health."

"Oh," I remark, understandin', "you're figgerin' on stickin' some fight club with this comic opera bout?"

"There ain't no sugar in lettin' 'em fight in private," says Cassidy.

"But this battle would have to be framed

so's Regan would win," I object. "This Australian would have to be taught that a high dive was expected of him the minute one of Mike's gloves touched him."

"What of it?"

"What of it! Would you be a party to a fixed fight?"

"How d'you think I got these sparklers?" he asks me, holdin' out his right hand so's I can admire his rings.

"Well, of course," I say to him, "you know this business better than I do." To myself, though, I'm sayin': "Watch this bird, Joe; he's a slicker! He'll double-cross you as quick as he would the next one."

"There ain't much about the fight game I don't know," admits Cassidy modestlike.

"Then you're on?" I ask him.

"Sure!" he nods.

"All right, then; come along," I tell him, leadin' him toward the door.

"Where're we goin'?" he asks me.

"We're goin' to sign a contract—you and me," I tell him sweetlike. "I want a ten-per-cent cut of everything Mike Regan, alias the Caveman, makes in the ring—beginnin' three months from to-day."

He made an awful holler at that, but I wouldn't take no for an answer. Either, I told him, the contract was signed or the deal was off. And I dared him to try to put it through without me, threatenin' to expose him if any Australian pugs were matched with Mike Regan except those of my choosin'. And, of course, he gave in.

This Cassidy in his own way was a cockoo! For one thing, he seemed to have the sportin' writers trained. A day or so after we'd doped out the plan of makin' Mike Regan forget Matty Hughes's mighty wallop, the sport pages began to be ornamented with little squibs tellin' how the grand and heroic record of Mike Regan entitled him to a bout with the champion. Interviews were printed with Mike and Cassidy accusin' the champ of deliberately duckin' them through fear and offerin' to fight him any time, any place and with any arrangements from winner-take-all up or down. I didn't quite get the low-down on these pieces of lit'rature, but Cassidy explained them, sayin':

"They bring Mike into prominence. If the people read often enough that his main object in life is to get the champ into the same ring with him they'll believe it. Then, when we spring this Australian battler, it will look like there's some excuse for him comin' here."

So I just laid low for a couple of weeks while Cassidy's advertisin' campaign went on, spendin' my spare time lookin' up a scrapper to introduce as the Australian conqueror of Matty Hughes. There was one thing I insisted on, though, and that was that it wouldn't be safe to go through with Cassidy's plan of lettin' Mike and the fake Australian fight it out in a regular ring.

"Don't think the sportin' public is fools," I told Cassidy. "If we let Mike knock out this bird in plain sight of everybody we can't expect nothin' but that the bout will leave a bad smell. Fixed fights always do. The result will be that you and Mike and me and everybody concerned will be in wrong."

"Well, what's your idea then?" Cassidy wants to know.

"I was thinkin'," I says, "that we could take Mike out to the country to train. Then we could let this Australian bird follow him right up and put his trainin' quarters in the next house to Mike's. We could set him to work gettin' Mike's goat until finally Mike's temper gives way and he cleans up the place with the Australian. Then we'd have to call the fight off. The newspapers would go strong to the story of one boxer lickin' another while they're trainin' and Mike would be better known than he ever was and in a good position to demand a match with the best of 'em."

"Say!" says Cassidy. "For a beginner at this game you show talent!"

"The game of fakin' ain't confined to the prize-ring," I tell him.

All right. So far, so good. The next question before the house is that of gettin' Mike's Australian opponent. I dug him up. He's a broth of an Irish lad named Cornelius O'Mara, a red-headed, hard-faced goofer I found workin' 'longshore on an East River pier. The proposition of takin' a nice vacation with pay appealed to him strong. He quit his job as soon as I told

him what I wanted of him and went along with me. Cassidy bought us a couple of suits, which he said was appropriate for Australians — loose-fittin' garments of stained-glass tints, gunboat shoes and caps —then he bought us a couple of trunks and we were ready.

We began operations from Chicago. We entered a hotel there as Joe Conner and Cornelius O'Mara, of New York, and left it Alf Hayes and Bull McArdle, of Melbourne. The trunks I plastered with phony hotel and steamship labels which I'd dug up as evidence of our trip from Australia and across the United States from Frisco. From Chicago I mailed to all the New York sportin' editors neat little news pieces to the effect that Alf Hayes, pilotin' Bull McArdle, the knockout king of Australia, would arrive at the Penn station at 11 P.M. on Wednesday, the twenty-sixth.

McArdle, said the article, was a wealthy young farmer whose middle name was fight. He hadn't monkeyed around the ring much in Australia because there was nobody there who could give him a go. That was put in with the idea of stillin' suspicion when it was discovered that there was no Bull McArdle among the Australian knuckle-pushers. Then came the story of the three one-round knockouts of Matty Hughes and the part Matty had played in the fightin' career of Mike Regan. McArdle, the article finished, bein' desirous of becomin' champion of the world, was ready to start at the top and tackle Mike Regan. He was willin' to bet any amount he could lick Mike and to fight him under any conditions Mike or his manager might suggest.

The part of the story havin' to do with the knockout of Mike Regan by Matty Hughes went big. The newspapers all went after Cassidy about that. Cassidy, knowin' the best way of gettin' anything into the newspapers is by tryin' to hide it, at first denied that Mike had ever even heard of Matty Hughes. The reporters' clever questions, however, drawed out of him the reluctant admission that there was a blot on Mike's book of life. Cassidy betrayed signs of panic at the thought of Mike bein' stacked up against a guy who could lick Matty Hughes in a punch, thereby causin' each and every reporter to become immediately a volunteer press-agent for the project of stagin' such a match.

Lest these guys were not convinced then that the arrival of Bull McArdle was worth a good write-up, Cassidy denounced Bull and his manager, Alf Hayes, as a pair of notoriety-seekers, endeavorin' to make capital of the sterlin' reputation of Mike Regan, and he threatened libel suits and beatin's up to every guy who printed a word about the man from Australia. Put thus on their mettle, the reporters proceeded to demonstrate the freedom of the press by givin' the event a half a colyum or so, instead of the little squib it was worth. And when Cornelius O'Mara and me stepped off the train on the night of the twenty-sixth there was a mob of sportin'-writers and flashlight photographers there to meet us.

Havin' devoted many long hours to the perfection of a style of speech suitable to a pilgrim from the Antipodes I was ready for them. O'Mara had been instructed to pretend he was deaf and dumb. It was funny to see the reporters tryin' to get a statement out of him and him replyin' "huh!" and "ah!" and "hah?" which I'd learned him was the only sounds he was to make under penalty of losin' his job.

I, though, addressed the reporters as "me lads," assured them that Bull and me wouldn't rest until we'd got this bally, bloomin' bloke Regan into the ring, give them a little lecture on crop, trade and sport conditions in Australia which I'd memorized from some magazine articles Cassidy's press-agent had found and then beat it for a hotel in a taxi.

Bull McArdle got a whole scrap-book full of notices the next mornin' The reporters commented on his remarkable physique and rugged countenance, offerin' evidence of the truth of their statements in the flashlight photos of Bull that accompanied the articles.

Cassidy was around to the newspaper offices that day almost as early as the printers. He bawled out the sports-writers who'd give the Australian all that space and left behind him in each office a little typewritten sheet darin' Bull McArdle or his manager to put up some of the money

they talked so loud about so's he could see if they were really serious about wantin' to fight Regan. These articles was printed, and then I made the rounds of the newspaper offices. I called Cassidy and Regan some names and handed out some articles of my own. They were good articles, too, havin' been written by the same guy who wrote Cassidy's.

Before two days passed there was great public clamor for a bout between Mike Regan and Bull McArdle. Cassidy and me hung back for a time, meanwhile slingin' slurs at each other and our respective fighters. Various sportin'-writers, seein' a grudge fight brewin', attempted to bring me and Cassidy together, but we hemmed and hawed and stalled. Then one day Dave McGlynn, of Newark, New Jersey, took a hand in the game.

Dave was plannin' an all-star show for his Brookside A. C., and he offered a thousand bucks, to be split fifty-fifty or however else we chose, for eight rounds between Regan and McArdle as the semifinal of his tournament. Cassidy called me up on the phone to tell me this offer was the one, and we got together with McGlynn at his office.

That was where I got my first sight of Mike Regan since enterin' into the deal with Cassidy. Even in his street clothes Mike sure looked like the goods. With them shoulders he'd have to turn sidewise goin' through a four-foot door. His chest stuck out in front of him like an awnin'. You could have posted bills on his chin. He'd just been shaved, but his black beard was the kind that no barber could hide; it would have took an exterior decorator to do that. But when he caught a sight of Cornelius O'Mara I could see the reason why Bill Cassidy wanted to tie a can to him. The big stiff actu'lly begun to shake. His eyes blinked, he gulped a couple of times; then he looked away from O'Mara scared-like and begun to glance around McGlynn's office. O'Mara, as I've hinted before, was a fierce-lookin' bird in his own right, but he certainly oughtn't to have frightened no regular pug that way.

McGlynn gave those two big hulks the once-over, grinned like he was well satisfied with the pitcher his mind held of them facin' each other in the ring; then he opened the drawer of his desk and pulled out some typewritten sheets.

"Gents," he says, spreadin' the papers out, "I have here the articles of agreement for eight rounds between Michael, known as Mike, Regan and—what's the front name of your principal, Mr. Hayes?" he asks me.

"Clawrence," I tell him.

—"and Clarence McArdle," says McGlynn. Then he proceeds to mumble some chatter about the party of the first part and so forth which he read from the paper.

Just then a couple of reporters, lookin' for fight dope from McGlynn, dropped into the office. I seen them and rose to the occasion with a grand-stand play.

"I s'y, old chap," I says to McGlynn, "I think this here Regan guy—er—fellah is ascared—I mean afraid of my mon. Dash it all, I rully think he'll tike the gite, don' cha know?"

"Ahr, wha' d'ye mean?" growls Cassidy, takin' his cue real cleverlike and actin' up for the reporters.

"I'm bettin'—I mean wygerin'," I say, "that he'll run out on us."

"Run out—me eye!" barks Cassidy. "The only runnin' he'll do will be after that big red-headed stiff of yours!"

"Bunk—I mean rubbish!" I say back. "Y' know, Mr. McGlynn," I tell the club manager, "just for my own protection, I'd like this Cassidy person to post a forfeit that—"

"A fine idea!" agrees McGlynn. "I'll make him furnish a surety bond so that the club will be protected if—"

"Club—nothin'!" I say. "My mon is seekin' a reputation in this fight, and if Regan won't go into the ring with him—"

"Fight it out between you," says McGlynn.

"No fightin' necessary!" Cassidy butts in. "I'll furnish a bond; yes, and I'll bet him a thousand right now that Regan wins by a knockout!"

As Cassidy had the thousand, and produced it, our little side battle looked like the goods to the reporters.

"Keep your chicken-feed—I mean your —your shillin's!" I say to Cassidy like I'm disgusted. Mr. McArdle and me cawn't

be botherin' with no small wygers like that. Would you mind phonin' to a bondin' company," I ask McGlynn, "and havin' them send some one here to—"

"How about me?" growls Cassidy. "Ain't you goin' to furnish a bond?"

"I s'y, old deah," I laugh at him, d'ye think I'd be awfter comin' all the w'y from Orstrylia if I didn't mean business? I don't require no bond."

"That's right, Bill," one of the reporters tells Cassidy. "He told you something then."

"Aw, all right," grumbles Cassidy. "We'll fix the bond up later."

"We will not!" I tell him, and I hold the whole game up while McGlynn gets a guy over from a bondin' company and a bond of five thousand bucks is fixed up payable to me if Regan doesn't appear in the ring on the night of the all-star show. I snickered somethin' fierce when Cassidy had to shell out some thirty-six bucks to pay for the bond.

After that's done, me and Cassidy exchange some pleasantries for the benefit of the reporters; then we sign the articles of agreement and beat it.

"That was a good play—that bond thing," says Cassidy when we get into the hall, "but why did you make me go through with it? Cripe! There's no sense in chuckin' away over thirty-six bucks!"

"The reporters will believe it's all on the level now," I tell him. "If they hadn't seen you sign that bond they might have suspected it was all bunk."

"Maybe you're right," agrees Cassidy doubtful-like, sighin' for the lost thirty-six.

Cassidy and Regan start off immediately for Point Pleasant, New Jersey, where Johnny De Foe, the old-time lightweight, has a bungalow. It's reported to the newspapers that that's the trainin'-grounds Mike Regan has picked.

The next afternoon me and O'Mara follow. We drive up to the house next door to Johnny De Foe's in an automobile. With us is three or four gunmen that I'd hired to pose as O'Mara's sparrin'-partners. Cassidy and Regan are sittin' on the porch of Johnny's bungalow when our car stops. I thought Regan would drop dead. He flops back in his chair with his eyes poppin' out of their sockets. He waves his hands weak-like in our direction, and tries to talk; but the words won't come. Cassidy rushes from the porch and shakes his fist in my face.

"How dare you come down here?" he yells.

"I thought, old chap," I tell him pleasantlike, but loud enough for Mike Regan to hear it, "that this was a free country."

"You keep your man out of our way!" Cassidy warns me. "If you don't I'll have Mike lick him—right here; we won't wait to get into the ring!"

I laugh at him and help the bunch unload boxin'-gloves, punchin'-bags, satchels, canned goods and other junk from the automobile.

Cassidy beats it back to the porch, and I hear him givin' orders to Mike Regan to swing on O'Mara the first time their paths cross.

"Suppose he did lick Matty Hughes?" he says. "You can lick him—and I want you to do it! He ain't got no right to be trainin' here. You just wallop blazes out of him if he so much as winks at you. Ain't that right, Johnny?" he asks Johnny De Foe, who's just come out of the bungalow to see what all the row's about.

"Sure!" says Johnny. "And if Mike don't lick the big stiff, I'll do it myself!"

I could see Mike perk up a little bit at that. He feels the muscle in his arm and studies O'Mara as though tryin' to dope out whether a couple of wallops would disturb my big red head. I grin, feelin' that my plan is showin' signs of workin'.

I guess I don't need to tell you that O'Mara wasn't scheduled to do no regular trainin'—only go through the motions. We had all the props—in case any reporters dropped in on us—but boxin', bag-punchin', road work and that kind of thing didn't make much of a hit with my 'long-shore boy. The only bag he punched was the pillow, and he done that with his head—every time I'd let him. Most of his other exercise was took with a pair of bones that one of his apparent sparrin'-partners disclosed as soon as we were settled in the bungalow.

I had given a lot of serious thought to the proposition of gettin' Mike Regan's

goat and I'd come to the trainin'-quarters all prepped to put into effect what I thought was a pip of a scheme for doin' it. It was simple and based on my own experience. The one time in my life that I could have committed murder without regrets was after livin' for a month in a house where there was a young baby on the floor above me and a phonograph fiend on the floor below. It was losin' sleep that done it, and I figgered that the same treatment was liable to have the same effect on Mike Regan. Accordin'ly I introduced a novelty in pugilism—night trainin'.

Our gang slept all day, or as much of the day as we wanted to. Then, after everybody in Mike Regan's quarters was safely in the hay, we got busy. We jumped on the floors. We pounded on the floors with chairs and clubs. We yelled and screeched. We hurled tin water-buckets around. We did everything we could think of to make enough noise to prevent the people next door from sleepin'. I'd let one of my goofers punch a bag for a minute or so; then I'd signal him to stop and I'd shoot off a pistol. To Mike Regan's excited ears these sounds would tell a horrible story—Bull McArdle was such a terrific and powerful puncher that an ordinary punchin'-bag could stand up under no more than a few light taps from him. Or we'd scream and yell and pound for a little while; then we'd stop and, when all was quiet, we'd inquire of each other at the top of our voices whether the guy Bull McArdle had just knocked out was dead or only crippled for life. And the next day, while Mike was sunnin' himself on the porch of Johnny De Foe's house, one of our crew would hobble up and down in front of him on crutches and with his head all bandaged.

A bright guy might have thought all this looked phony, but not Mike Regan. Poor Mike took it all as evidence that Bull McArdle was the most ferocious and bloodthirsty murderer unhung. In two or three days Mike was hollow-cheeked and wild-eyed. Between the strain of lookin' forward to facin' such a slaughterin' brute as McArdle and his loss of sleep Mike was fit to be tied. His condition wasn't improved any by the fact that Cassidy, De Foe and their assistants drove him at top speed all day long. Our night antics didn't bother them much; they slept in the daytime the same as those in our camp, one or two of them stayin' up to see that Mike did all that was required of him in the way of road work and other trainin' stunts.

Cassidy and De Foe kept eggin' Mike on to raid our bungalow and slaughter McArdle.

"That guy's just tryin' to get your goat," they'd tell him. "Why don't you go in and make him quit? You're the biggest guy here—the only one that's big enough to tackle him."

A couple of times, Cassidy reported to me, Mike seemed on the point of takin' their advice, but each time he must have thought of Matty Hughes and McArdle's three wins over him and got cold feet, for he shook his head and stayed where he was. He almost got down on his knees to Cassidy askin' him either to shift the trainin'-quarters to some place where there'd be less noise at night or to let him train at night, too.

"What!" yelps Cassidy. "Show that guy that he's got us on the run? Let him drive us out of here? I guess not! That bird McArdle don't scare me none, and I'd like you to show him that he don't by bustin' in on him and givin' him a blame good beatin'."

There was no movin' Mike, though.

Well, ten days went by and with them ten nights, and for them ten nights Mike Regan hardly slept a wink. He got so surly and grouchy that Cassidy, De Foe and the rest of them began to get afraid of him. For the first time in his career, Cassidy said, he began to take some joy in workin' out with his sparrin'-partners. That is to say he was takin' out on them all the hate he was developin' for Bull McArdle.

He acted so vicious in his trainin' bouts that his sparrin'-partners organized a small-sized strike and made Regan put on fourteen-ounce gloves. Even with those kind of sofa-cushions on his mitts he was knockin' 'em out as fast as they'd stand up to him. Cassidy and De Foe were pleased at this; they thought Mike's cruel way of wallopin' his trainers was an indication of

quick curtains for Bull McArdle whenever Mike was worked up enough to try a punch at the fake Australian.

On the tenth day Cassidy and I held a council of war while Mike was out on the road.

"I been thinkin'," said Cassidy, "that maybe we been goin' too far with this stuff."

"How so?" I asked him.

"Well," Cassidy said, "even an iron man like Mike can't lose only a certain amount of sleep without goin' bad altogether. Another week of this and Mike will be ready for one of two things—the bug-house or the cemetery."

"You don't care," I told him.

"I don't—in a way," admitted Cassidy, "but, if Mike's goin' to get cured of his fool fear of professional fighters, there's no use of havin' him drop dead on us immediately after."

"What do you suggest?" I inquired.

"I was thinkin'," said Cassidy, "that as long as Mike don't show any desire to go in and fight McArdle, we'd better get McArdle in to fight Mike."

"That's a good idea," I told him.

"We'll do it to-morrow," said Cassidy. "Just let McArdle come into our place, call Mike a few names and make a swing at him. I'll guarantee Mike 'll do the rest."

"You're on," I told him. "I'll have McArdle in right after breakfast."

In order that Mike might be at his grouchiest the next mornin' Cassidy and De Foe drove him like a dog all that day. Also, I assembled my goofers, told them what was comin' off and notified them that they were expected to raise more racket that night than they'd ever done before.

"We'll let Regan sleep for about an hour," I told them, "then we'll start in with the noise. We're not to let him sleep a wink—all the rest of the night. His nerves have got to be absolutely raw, he's got to be wild enough to commit murder in the mornin'."

That night the lights went out next door about nine o'clock. At a quarter after ten I got my gang together and gave orders to commence firin'. In a second our bungalow was wabblin' around on its foundations. We pounded and yelled and screeched like never before. A minute later the light went up in the second-story room next door where Mike Regan slept. I signaled my gang to quiet down a little and peeped out through the blinds.

Mike was at his bedroom window. His eyes were blinkin' from lack of sleep and shinin' with anger. His face was workin' in a way that almost scared me. He was shakin' his big fists at our shack and yellin' at the top of his voice.

"I can't stand dis!" he was sayin'. "I can't stand it no more! I got to sleep! I got to sleep, I say! Shut up dere!" he shouted. "Shut up, or I'll—"

What he'd do if we didn't shut up I couldn't hear, for I waved my hand, nodded my head and my gang began cuttin' up ructions again. I thought they'd raise the roof. Our little bungalow was shakin' like from an earthquake. The yells and shouts of my gunmen were terrible to hear.

Mike Regan stood at his window for a few seconds, shakin' his fists and screechin'. If it hadn't been that we were doin' it all for his own good I'd have been almost sorry for him. Then he suddenly disappeared from the window.

A few seconds later there was a crash from the front of our house that sounded above all the noise we were makin'. The gang heard it and stopped screechin' and poundin'.

"Go ahead—keep it up!" I yelled at them, and the noise started once more.

And then suddenly the door of the back room we were in fell from its hinges and from the wreck of it leaped a queer, terrifyin' figger. It was Mike Regan, his black hair standin' out wild in all directions, his eyes burnin' like coals, his big hairy chest heavin', his long, thick arms wavin' like a busted windmill. His only garment was the pants part of a suit of purple pajamas and his feet were bare. Behind him came Cassidy and De Foe, both in their night clothes.

Mike stood for a second after scramblin' to his feet, gazin' into the room like the light hurt his eyes. Then his hairy chest swelled as he drew a long breath and from his lips came a wild roar.

"Where's McArdle?" he yelled. "Show me McArdle!"

My red-headed longshoreman stepped forward, grinnin'.

"I'm McArdle," he started to say, but there was no time for the words to come from his mouth. Mike gave another roar and rushed forward, head down and arms swingin'.

I was right behind McArdle, three foot back. I stepped aside for personal reasons—I had no ambition to serve as a cushion to soften the fall of McArdle's two hundred pounds of beef when Mike hit him. Cassidy stood in the doorway, rubbin' his hands and grinnin'. De Foe also looked pleased, and my goofers, tickled to death at the idea of witnessin' a slaughter, hopped to the places from which they could best view the spectacle.

And right then a series of gasps came from several throats. McArdle, instead of standin' there to receive Mike's rush, stepped clumsily but lightly aside. Not only that, but as he moved, he brought up his right and landed flush on Mike's face. The blow halted Mike's rush and straightened him up like a ramrod. For a second a surprised, hurt look came to Mike's face. A stream of red covered his lips and chin as the blood spurted from his nose. It was only for a second, though, that he was stopped. His head went down again, his arms began to swing and he rushed at McArdle.

"I'll learn yuh! I'll learn yuh!" he roared as he shot forward.

This time McArdle didn't dodge. He stood right up to Mike, and hurled a vicious wallop at his jaw. Again he landed and Mike was staggered. Not only that, but McArdle went right after him. Right and left his fists landed on Mike's face. Cassidy's caveman gave ground, but McArdle was right on top of him.

Bang, bang, bang! the big longshoreman's knuckles sounded on Mike's jaw. Desperate, Mike tried to fight back, but it was useless—McArdle had him on the run, and, gruntin' and breathin' with each blow, he drove his fists into Mike's face. And suddenly Mike went down. There was no fakin' about it; he wasn't quittin'—he was knocked out clean as Matty Hughes ever had done it in that burleycue theayter, and the whole thing hadn't taken more than ten seconds!

McArdle, seein' Mike fall, flopped on top of him, grabbed both his ears and started to pound his head on the floor. River-front stuff it was. It took four of us to drag him away and to haul him over to a corner where we held him until he cooled down.

Meanwhile Mike never stirred. A couple of his sparrin'-partners were dousin' him with cold water, workin' his arms and rubbin' his head and chest.

I don't know who was the most surprised man in that room. Cassidy, De Foe and me looked at each other like three fools, with eyes wide open and mouths likewise. I was the first to speak.

"Well," I said to Cassidy, "this guy may not be from Australia, but—"

"But he's the goods!" Cassidy finished for me. "He's awkward, he don't know nothin' about handlin' himself, but I'll tell the world he's got class at that! Why, right now he can lick fifty per cent of the heavies in the ring, and, with a little trainin'—"

Cassidy rolled his eyes up, and put out his fat arms in a way to express that in his opinion a little trainin' was all my red head needed to put him in the championship class.

About then Mike Regan showed signs of comin' to life. He rolled his head weaklike from side to side and his eyes opened a little. Cassidy happened to see him, and rushed over.

"Why, you big dub!" yelped Cassidy, shakin' his fist in Mike's face. "You yeller hound! You're a fighter, huh? Did you see what that guy just done to you—a feller that never had a pair of gloves on in his life? He licked you—licked you clean! You—you—" he stuttered. "I'm through with you! D'you get that? To-morrow mornin' you pack your things and get! I ain't got no more time to waste on the likes of you! I'm—I'm—"

And all of a sudden Cassidy's face lighted up. He swings around from Mike and rushes over to McArdle. He grabs my big boy's hand.

"You—son!" he screeches. "You for me! You can fight! I'm goin' to make a champ out of you! I'm settin' that false alarm you just licked adrift, and I'm pickin' you up in his place! To-morrow mornin' you and me sign a contract! I can get you the dough; I can make you—"

"Er—just a second," I butt in. "You're a little hasty about signin' up this boy, I think."

"Hasty!" laughs Cassidy. "Hasty! That's good! Why, this bird's a find! He's—"

"Sure he is," I admit. "He's a lulu! I didn't know how good he was myself—not until just now. But you can't sign him up," I say, grinnin'.

"Can't! What do you mean?"

"You can't," I say, "for the simple reason that he's under contract to me!"

"Huh!" grunts Cassidy. "That's a joke. You know you was only workin' for me, and—"

"Maybe," I say, "but the fact remains that I've got Cornelius O'Mara, alias Bull McArdle, tied up with a five-year contract. I'm to be his manager, and I'm to get twenty-five per cent of all he makes as a fighter in that time."

"Don't kid," says Cassidy.

"No kiddin' about it," I tell him. "The contract's good—it would stand in court. Now, listen," I say, "for friendship's sake, I might be willin' to let you buy my contract for—well, say, forty-five hundred bucks."

"For—for—forty-five hundred!" gasps Cassidy. "You're crazy!"

"Am I?" I smile. "Well, then, maybe you'd rather forfeit that five-thousand-dollar bond you gave—"

"That was a joke," says Cassidy.

"You seem to think everything's a joke," I tell him. "Of course, I *could* go to Dave McGlynn and the sports-writers and tell them how we took them all in in arrangin' this fake fight. That would help your reputation a whole lot, that would! *I* don't mind about lettin' them know about my part in it. They can't hurt me; I'm not a regular fight manager."

"You wouldn't do that!" exclaims Cassidy weaklike.

"I would," I tell him, "in a minute. Listen, Cassidy," I say, "I'm goin' to get mine out of this affair in some way. That forty-five-hundred-dollar offer for McArdle's—er—O'Mara's contract is a bargain. Of course, if you'd rather I claimed the bond, managed McArdle for a few bouts and then peddled the contract elsewhere, why—"

"Will you take four thousand?" asks Cassidy, weakenin'.

"Forty-five hundred," I say, "or—"

"Aw, all right," grunts Cassidy. "It's cheap at that, only it hurts an old bird like me to have a guy like you—"

"Cassidy," I say, "you needn't apologize. I guess we had beginner's luck—both me and O'Mara. I had no idea he was a battler."

"What did you sign him up for then?"

"I dunno," I says, "unless it was because I wanted to have you whichever way you turned. That bond was good anyhow. I had you tied up for a share of Regan's earnin's if this thing went through as we planned. I figgered the only other thing that possibly could happen was the thing that did, and I'd thought I'd better be ready for it."

"You're O. K.," Cassidy tells me. "I'd like to have you as a partner."

"No, thanks!" I grin. "You're not honest enough!"

*Just Two Weeks Away*

**"THE TRAIL HORDE"**

BY CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

***MARCH 13***

# Fixed by George

## by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Everything But the Truth," "Annexing Bill," etc.

### WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

GEORGE DARE'S irrepressible tendency to "fix" things amounted almost to a disease, so much so that when taken to task by his bride of a twelvemonth for a particularly atrocious piece of muddle-headed meddling, harsh words led to the departure of his helpmate for home and—in this case—sister—condition, also married; habitat, somewhere in Jersey.

About this time we find the handsome, dashing, equally married Dr. Arthur Poole extremely solicitous for the health of his patient, Angela Starr, daughter of the millionaire, with the result that he found it necessary to exercise a sort of personal supervision of the "case," so to speak: motor-rides, theater trips, etc.—all innocent, of course.

But when tearful Mrs. Poole, first name Margery, poured out her heart to her old friend, George, the latter, while averring his belief in the doctor's constancy, suggested a plan to bring matters to a head. Putting it in operation, he secured Arthur's acceptance of an invitation for a little dinner-party at George's Aunt Amanda's vacant house in Coulton, proceeding thither with Margery, Poole's wife, Poole himself following with Angela. But there would be no dinner-party—that was part of George's plan.

But on arrival they found the house brilliantly lighted. Aunt Amanda had evidently returned home. Then came the second blow. Hurriedly leaving the house, they were just in time to witness the abduction of George's car. It had begun to rain—heavily, persistently. George turned up his collar.

"Offhand, Margery," he remarked grimly, "I should say that we were going to have it out with Aunt Amanda after all."

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE ONE UP-STAIRS.

GEORGE'S nature, as we have seen, was naturally most sympathetic. He was the type that stops and squats and interviews little children, when they stand alone upon the street and weep; and the sufferings of older folk affected him in proportion. At another time, he would fairly have boiled over with concern at the state into which Margery Poole had passed.

Just now, he did not even simmer. He knew, subconsciously almost, that Margery's limited nerve had broken, and that she was trembling violently and sniffing in an ominous way, there in the dark beside him; he sensed vaguely that she was on the verge of unrestrained tears, if not of an actual mild collapse, yet for the moment his thoughts hardly more than touched upon Margery's pathetic condition.

They were really in a most embarrassing position. Had Aunt Amanda been some plump, kindly, credulous old lady, happy and benevolently beaming, as some old ladies really are, it would have been simple enough to return to the house, find her, tell the truth, and even enlist her aid.

Aunt Amanda was not. Circumstances had fostered the natural wealth of suspicion in Aunt Amanda's nature; she believed nothing of what she heard and only a little of what she saw. She was tall and very thin, with a hawk nose, and a pair of penetrating eyes that scorned glasses.

And yet, be she what she might, she would have to hear the truth and be made to believe it, and that in very short order. The idea of staying around and waiting for Poole and his charmer had been erased from George's program some time since; indeed, the very thought of them sent a shiver through him now. They could not

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be more than ten or fifteen minutes distant at most, and—

"Oh, they've taken it! They've taken it!" Margery seemed to have been saying faintly for some time.

"Eh? Yes, they do seem to have taken it," George agreed.

"Who could have done that?"

"Professional automobile crooks, of course. That whole job went too smoothly to be mere chance."

"And you've lost your beautiful car, and—"

"That part doesn't matter," George said hurriedly. "The insurance company 'll present me with another, if that one isn't recovered. The car itself doesn't cut any particular figure; it's what it means to us just now in getting away from here!"

"Y-yes!"

"Let's go back!" said George.

"Back where?"

"To the house, of course."

"But your—your aunt is there!"

"We can't help that, Margery. It's her house. I'll explain the thing to her."

"And no matter what you explain to her, she—she'll still think that we—that I—no, I won't go back, George!" Margery said, positively.

"We can't stand here in the rain all night, you know," George said with commendable patience.

"No, but I won't have her see me! We can walk to Coulton and get a car!"

"There isn't any garage at Coulton. We can't hire a car any nearer than that Arborvale town we went through, Margery—nine miles back. What have you got on your feet?"

"Kid slippers, but—"

"Well, you can't walk nine miles through a pouring rain in kid slippers—that's a simple, physical impossibility, Margery. We'll have to go in and do the best we can with aunt, and then telephone Arborvale in a hurry. There is still a chance that we may be able to get away before Arthur and his lady friend turn up."

"Yes, and if we do, and you tell your aunt the truth, when they come—"

"I'm not going to tell her the truth," George said briefly. "I'll invent a magnificent lie that will hold water. She doesn't know you."

"And if it doesn't," Margery said helpfully, and there was a choke in her voice, "and Arthur does tell her the truth about your wretched old party and all, then she'll *know* that you and I—oh, that's horrible, too! I'll always have that to think of! Every time I go on the street, I'll be afraid of meeting her!"

George controlled himself.

"I suppose, if we feel just like standing here in the rain all night, we can think up six or seven hundred other objections before morning," he said caustically. "We're in an unfortunate little mess, and it's my fault, and I'm trying to find the easiest and quickest way out."

"Yes, it *is* your fault!" Margery sobbed. "If you hadn't been so brilliant about trapping Arthur, we'd never—"

"I know," George said briefly. "I'm going into the house now. You'd better come with me."

There was a terrified gasp beside him as he stepped out; then a slim hand caught his arm, and Margery was stumbling along at his side.

"I think you're brutal!" she choked.

"I am," George agreed bitterly. "But I think that if you'll stop crying it may improve matters a little, Margery. I'm conjuring up a pretty good one for aunt and for Arthur, too, about how you and I were playing a trick on a house-party when we stopped here and had our car stolen and a lot more—and you won't look the part of a gay little roisterer if you go in with tears streaming."

He paused at the veranda steps and patted her shoulder. He even laughed. "Don't be silly, child," he said quite soothingly. "I've got the whole yarn now, and it'll work for both of them—dead sure. Everything is all right."

"Really all right?" Margery murmured dubiously.

"Absolutely!" said George. "All you have to do is listen and back me up and giggle spasmodically once or twice. I'll get it over inside of two minutes! Come."

He laughed again, loudly this time by way af announcing their arrival to Aunt

Amanda. He pushed open the door, and for the second time in a very few minutes they viewed the comfortable interior—deserted as before. But on this occasion George marched in boldly, looked about with the mischievous grin of an innocent, harum-scarum young man about to surprise a staid, elderly aunt, and called:

"Aunty! Oh, aunty!"

He waited, then, for the stirring that would come from some other part of the house—waited through ten soundless seconds and ten more after them.

"I say, aunt!" called George. "Aunt Amanda!"

Hands in his pockets, grinning still, he gazed up-stairs; and slowly, as the utter silence of the place remained unbroken, the grin disappeared.

"That's funny, isn't it?" said George.

"Is she deaf?"

"She could hear a pin drop when she went to California. Where the dickens is she, anyway? She—I wonder if she's sick, up above there?"

"She might be dead, in a place like this, and nobody'd ever know it for months!" Margery shuddered.

Out in the kitchen, something sizzled faintly. Suddenly and relievedly, George's grin reappeared.

"She's in the woodshed, hauling logs for her stove, of course," he announced. "Aunt's old-fashioned, you know. She loses sixteen cooks a year, on the average, because they won't chop wood for the stove. We'll go out and greet her, and I'll haul in a load, Margery. That'll be a happy start for the conversation, too."

He marched through the dining-room, and Mrs. Poole—who seemed to have no yearning at all to be left alone—hurried after him. Gaily through the kitchen door swung George and headed toward that other door, across the room, which lead to the dark outer world and the woodshed. And he came to a very abrupt halt, did George, and scowled wonderingly, for the door was locked and heavily bolted on the inside, and it was quite apparent that Aunt Amanda had not passed that way.

Yet it was for a moment only that the door itself held George's attention. Delightful faint odors were in here—odors such as never had emanated from Aunt Amanda's plain cooking in the past. His eyes roved to the stove and, having arrived, remained there, fascinated. George thrust his head forward and blinked and stared again.

"Why, what a nice kitchen your aunt has!" Margery observed.

"Er—hasn't she?" muttered George. "I'm not dreaming, then. You see all those copper pots, too, do you?"

"See them? Of course I see them! They're all brand-new!"

"They looked that way to me—and there are six of them," breathed the nephew. "And that electric stove's brand-new, also."

"Yes, and isn't it a dandy?" cried Mrs. Poole, quite delightedly, as she hurried to it and inspected its shining smugness. "Your aunt isn't old-fashioned at all! She—is she rich?"

"She's no spendthrift," said George. "Why?"

"Because those stoves are horribly expensive. I wanted to get a little one—smaller than this, and not nearly so nice—and they wanted something like eighty dollars for it."

George smiled strangely.

"Those copper pots are pretty expensive, too, aren't they?"

"Oh, fearfully!"

"I thought as much!" said young Mr. Dare, and straightened up and looked about in some bewilderment. "I guess we're in the wrong house, Margery!"

"This—this isn't your aunt's?"

"It used to be, certainly. I've known the place and all the furniture since I was a little child. But this isn't aunt's stuff, Margery. She had three iron pots and that wood stove, and she's used them for forty years. And while I'd hate to say that my aunt is close-fisted, you know, I'd cheerfully bet that nothing short of a surgical operation would ever separate her from the price of all that modern foolishness over there."

"But she must have—"

"I don't see how she can be back," George muttered. "I had a letter from her only yesterday, and she was starting up to

visit some people in Seattle that afternoon. I—let me think."

The first wonder had passed. Hard realities were prodding their way into George's consciousness again. He favored the pleasantly simmering pots with a last, uncomprehending stare, shrugged his shoulders, and made for the dining-room again, with Margery at his heels.

"I give it up," he said. "I don't know what it means. Maybe it's fairies, or maybe aunt's whole nature changed out there. It looks as if she had returned unexpectedly and cooked dinner for somebody—and perhaps she's gone off to fetch them. Aunt may own a car now, if she's capable of all this. Anyhow, none of it alters the fact that we'll have to get out of here without any dallying. Would you like to look around for her up-stairs while I'm telephoning the garage?"

"I would not!" Margery said flatly. "And—and hurry, George! If she's only away or asleep or something, so that we can get away before she finds us!"

George Dare picked up the telephone.

"Hello!" he said, and paused. "Hello, operator!—I say, wake up, will you?"

He frowned impatiently and waited again. He worked the hook up and down and spoke further—while Margery Poole stood and gazed expectantly, eager even for the words that meant the beginning of their escape. And then, after a last effort which all but dislodged the hook, George shook his head, smiled sourly, and set down the instrument again.

"Aunt hasn't had her connected up yet," he said, meditatively. "There's not so much as a hum on that wire."

"You—you can't get Arborville at all?"

"Not that way—not without writing a few letters and having some linemen sent out here, and so on. Don't get excited, Margery. We—"

"How can I help it?" Margery cried, her voice rising. "We've *got* to get away before Arthur comes, aunt or no aunt, car or no car! I've been thinking; I was thinking while you were trying to telephone. It sounded so all right this afternoon, when you were telling me about it—clever, and everything. But now that we're here, I see how it must look to him, if he catches us trying to get away. He'll simply know that there is something between us!"

"What?"

"Yes, and he'll think that we're trying to play some ghastly, unspeakable joke on him—you having *me* here to greet him when he comes with another woman! And that we got scared at the last moment and decided to run, and—"

"Well, that's a very novel idea, I must say," George said tartly. "Will you please try to keep cool, Margery, and let me find the way out?"

"I'll try, but—" Margery quivered.

"Coming right down to brass tacks, there's just one way; we'll have to walk! The people next door have a car—or used to have one. I don't know them very well, but I'll identify myself and borrow the thing. The house is nearly half a mile from here. Can you make that in the mud?"

"George, I'd gladly walk from here to San Francisco in mud up to my neck if it would get us out of here before Arthur comes and finds us!"

"We'll do that, then. It's a beastly stunt to put you through, but I suppose you'd rather do that than wait here alone for me?"

"Sha'n't we—sha'n't we start now, George?" Margery asked.

With a sigh, he would have done so much to aid her, tucked the thick cape about Margery Poole and turned up his own collar again.

At the very happiest, it meant a thorough soaking, with all that might entail for one of Margery's rather frail physique. And the people next door might be away—or they might have sold their car—or they might refuse to remember George—or Aunt Amanda and the new motor he hazily assumed her to possess might pick them up along the road or—George summoned a smile, and buttoned his coat, as he pushed aside these possibilities and several new ones which occurred to him. They were chances that would have to be taken.

"Cheer up, my child; it will not be so very bad," he said reassuringly. "In fact, I don't know that it isn't the best thing

that could have happened to us, everything considered. I'll carry you over the puddles, and—"

"George!" gasped Margery, and her eyes grew wild suddenly as she clutched him. "We're caught!"

"Hey?"

"We are! Arthur's here! *He's walking out there on the veranda!*"

She reeled against George Dare. He steadied her and, scalp prickling a little if the truth be told, listened—and then he smiled abruptly and grimly.

"That's not outdoors; that's aunt walking up-stairs," he said softly. "She must have been out in the big bedroom at the end of the south wing. That's why she didn't hear us. It's all right, though. I'll fix it, Margery. She—oh, she's coming down, isn't she?" he whispered, as the steps sounded briskly through the upper corridor of the big old house.

"She—she doesn't walk like an old lady!"

"No, does she?" George muttered. "She must have taken a new lease of life out there; she always shuffled."

The steps stopped.

"Oh, Gracie!" called an entirely strange voice above—a very melodious voice, too, which unquestionably belonged to a woman much younger than Aunt Amanda. "How in the world did you get in?"

Open-mouthed, George stared upward. As yet the person was not visible, but he knew quite well that she was a total stranger.

"It—it isn't Gracie!" he stammered.

"Isn't she with you?" asked the voice. "What detained you? You said you'd be here before—"

And she appeared!

Aye, she appeared at the head of the stairs just then, and she began to descend, and while a lady with a lighted bomb or a lady with two heads might have sent a considerable shock through George Dare, neither of them could have produced a much more profound effect than this lady, who had no bomb at all, and only one head.

She was young; she could hardly have been past twenty-three or four. She was beautiful—or she might have been beautiful, had she been content with nature's work. But as she appeared just now, paint had covered what fine skin powder did not conceal; her large, deep eyes were blackened heavily, and their brows seemed fairly to have been plastered in with India ink! Her crimson lips had been worked, all by hand, to the perfect curve.

Nor were even these hideous manifestations quite as bad as the gown she wore! For a moment, that gown fairly stopped George Dare's breath. He had seen evening raiment of a really daring description upon ladies, but he had never seen anything like this. The low cut of its front elevation caused his eyes to bulge; the back, however, suggested that the lady had prepared, not for dinner, but for a spinal operation of the most desperate and radical character. Spangles glinted, where there was enough black satin to fasten spangles!

And yet—and yet there was something fine about that face—somehow. The forehead was broad and high, and very intelligent; the nose was straight and fine, and the chin quite full of character. The thought whirled dizzily through George's brain that if this woman had chosen the straight and narrow path she might have amounted to much. But—well, she had not. No electric sign could have proclaimed more clearly than did she herself that this female was a wanderer on the broadest part of the primrose highway!

And ladies of that stripe are more dangerous when intelligent, as was this one! Neither a child nor a prude, a little chill of horror ran through George. He glanced quickly at Margery and found that she had tottered against the doorway of the living-room, and she was staring, round-eyed, at the woman, as one might stare at a peculiarly dangerous snake.

Who she was, how she came to be there, did not matter. What she was seemed altogether too far beyond question. Nor did the mud outside matter, even if it came up to their knees! George gripped himself and ceased his gaping; there would have to be the swiftest kind of apology for their intrusion, and then headlong flight, and—why was she smiling at him?

There was something hideously significant in that smile, as the creature suddenly

came down-stairs, and paused, not two yards from George. Recognition beamed in it; her astonished, rather pleased survey lasted for another two minutes. Then:

"Why, *it's George!*" she cried.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### GUESTS OF THE HOUSE.

"OH!" gasped Mrs. Poole.

"I beg pardon?" smiled the person.

Even the sound of her—actually very pleasant—voice seemed to send a tremor of fright through Margery. She shrank away. She turned quickly toward George, as if imploring his protection from the presence—and then she gasped and recoiled from George, too!

"She—she knows you!" Margery choked.

And now, at last, the petrified tongue had detached itself from the roof of George's mouth. It was outrageous—it was incredible! Never in all his life had he laid eyes on the woman!

"She—does not!" he said, with some difficulty, and turned to the lady on the bottom step. "I—I—you're mistaken!"

"Am I?" asked the cool, even tone, and the ghastly brow rose. "That's queer. You are George, because—"

"Well, while that happens to be my name, I assure you that I'm not the George you mean, whoever he may be. You—you don't know me, madam. I've never had the—er—pleasure of meeting you."

"You have it now," the lady suggested, and her smile, which was growing ever more odd, wandered first to the clock, lingered there for a moment, and then passed to the pale person of Margery Poole, whom she considered keenly and contemplatively.

"That, of course," George said hurriedly. "What I mean is that—we're not the people you seemed to be expecting. We didn't know that there was any one here, and we—we came!"

It was not quite what he had intended to say. The queer smile flickered at him for an instant and then returned to Margery, who was growing whiter and whiter. Just under her breath, the mystery woman made a peculiar little sound—a sort of infinitesimal snort. Then her gaze came back to George once more and—that such a thing was absurd, it seemed to hold a certain suggestion of amused contempt!

"You came; that is obvious," the lady said helpfully. "And you walked in without ringing. Go on."

"Because I supposed the house to be empty, and I had the key."

"And where did you get the key, pray?"

There was something more than merely disconcerting about that cool voice and the serene, assured stare which accompanied it. George found himself reddening with anger.

"It was left in my keeping, of course!" he exploded. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Oh, are we to get acquainted? You might call me Miss—er—Woodbury."

"All right, then! What are you doing here?"

The lady leaned gracefully on the big newel post, and considered George, calmly as she had considered Margery.

"Please don't bawl like that," she said. "It isn't polite. I'm living here. Is that remarkable?"

"It is when I happen to know that you've no business here, and—"

"I've no—what?"

"Business here, I said! This is my aunt's house!"

"Is it, really?" smiled the imperturbable, painted one. "Well, for the next two months, it is mine!"

"You haven't bought the place?" George gasped.

"I have not. I rented it, furnished, for the balance of the autumn, day before yesterday, from the eccentric red-haired person who runs the real-estate business in conjunction with his grocery store, there in Coulton. Well?"

"I—I didn't even know she contemplated renting it!" George stammered.

His own stare grew rather blank and foolish. It did not seem to affect the lady before him, one way or the other. Silently, she continued her study of George Dare, and with the same contemptuous twinkle in her eye.

"I'm sorry, of course,'" she said suddenly.

"Sorry for what?"

"Spoiling the—er—pleasant evening you seemed to have planned, George. It's a beautifully isolated spot for such adventures, isn't it?"

"I—I don't know what you mean by that!" George stated hotly.

"Don't you?" the creature sneered. "Why the froth, then?"

Her lips curled at George. She smiled and stepped down, turned toward Margery, and paused when that pallid young woman began to retreat.

"See here, madam!" George shouted. "I—"

"See here, George! Drop that idiotic virtuous indignation, will you?" asked the lady. "You're used to fooling women, I presume, but this one is more than usually difficult to fool—although she wouldn't have to be particularly astute to understand this little affair of yours."

The contempt rang clear in her voice. She snapped her fingers in George's direction and turned her attention to the clock again. Hot and cold at once, George Dare attained her side with one stride. However she came to be here, this was a dangerous woman, of the type fully capable of blackmail later on. Not without warrant, she had reached the conclusion Margery most feared; and whatever had to be said and done now, George would have to say and do it, in the way of clearing her unwholesome mind of its false impression.

"Nevertheless, you're wrong," he began quietly. "This lady—"

"George, she *isn't* Geraldine!" said Miss Woodbury, and raised her thick brows!

"She—she—" George gasped, amazedly. "What—what on earth do you know about Geraldine?"

"Well, among other things, I know that she doesn't suspect you're here with this pretty little lady. Does she, now?"

"Of course not!" escaped George. "She—"

"Quite so—of course not. And if she ever should learn—" Miss Woodbury pursued, and seemed to be enjoying herself, when a sudden moan came from Margery Poole; a moan so loud and so sharp that both of them faced her quickly.

Margery, white to the very lips, was clutching Aunt Amanda's aged tapestry portière with one hand, while the other pressed her bosom. Circles seemed to have grown beneath her eyes, these last minutes; the eyes themselves were upon George Dare.

"I—see!" panted Margery.

"You—what's the matter?" George asked, as he stepped to her.

"I see it all now! Don't touch me, please! I'm not going to faint, and I don't want to feel your horrible hands on me. I—oh! *You*, George! *You*, a friend all these years, and—and—"

"What under the sun is it?"

"Oh, I might have known it!" Margery blazed suddenly. "All men are like that! All men hang together! I trusted you—when I might have known, George! And you—you!" she cried, pointing at Miss Woodbury. "*You're* the sort that make such things possible! Creatures like you make men what they are!"

The finger trembled; Margery panted. Miss Woodbury merely smiled.

"It sounds interesting, but I haven't caught the drift of it yet," she said smoothly. "You're accusing George of something naughty. Is that it?"

"Please! You told him that you were not a fool; be good enough to believe that I am not, either!" the astonished Margery cried fiercely. "You know quite well what I mean. This was all arranged between you!"

"What was arranged?" George gasped.

"Everything! Because Arthur has done what he has done, I had to be kept silent! You brought me to a place of this character, so that he could find me here with you and with—that woman. And afterward, whatever he may do, I'm to hold my peace forever because he can threaten me with divorce, and hold—hold that woman eternally over my head as a witness!"

"Margery, you're—you're—" George stuttered.

"Wrong? Oh, no, I'm not! She gave it all away when she came down those stairs and called you by name!"

Miss Woodbury laughed outright. Within his skull, George felt a strange pressure suggesting that it was about to burst.

"Well, you're wrong, just the same," he contrived. "Here! *You* tell her that she is mistaken!"

"Why should I bother to tell her anything?" Miss Woodbury smiled, and shrugged her very bare shoulders, and addressed Margery Poole directly. "Oh, my dear! My dear!" she said compassionately. "Your estimate of your own intelligence is very faulty, indeed, believe me."

"How dare you even speak to me when—"

"Oh, it is!" Miss Woodbury interrupted acidly. "For an alibi thought up on the spur of the moment, this impassioned nonsense of yours is the clumsiest, silliest thing I ever heard in all my life. Who's Arthur?"

"He's my husband!" Margery flared, unguardedly.

"Oh, you have a husband, have you? Worse and more of it!" sighed the painted lady. "Really, I've never posed as a censor of morals, but I'm forced to say that you're rather a choice pair!"

"Well, suppose you say nothing at all for a little while!" George said hoarsely. "Margery, listen to me! I tell you, you're wrong—dead wrong! I never laid eyes on that woman before to-night—I never even heard of her!"

"But she knows you and knows about Geraldine!"

"Well, that—" George began, and looked about wildly for inspiration.

And it was given to him! For over there on the living-room table Aunt Amanda's album of family photographs lay open; and George's lips opened, too, and he dashed at it and snatched it up, just as it was, and bore it triumphantly back to Margery Poole.

"*There!*" he shouted. "That's where she got her dope, Margery! There's the picture of Geraldine and me, taken the week after we were married, and Aunt Amanda's written under it—'George and Geraldine, married June 10, 1918!' There it is! Look at it!"

He held the thing under her very nose, waiting for vindication. Margery Poole's eyes merely glowed dark suspicion at him.

"I see it," she said. "Isn't it odd that the book lay all open like that, ready for you to show me?"

"Well, odd or not, that's where she got my name!" George shouted, in exasperation, and closed the book with a slam.

They faced each other, the two ladies, as he stepped back and thumped the album to its table. Miss Woodbury was still amused and, perhaps, just the smallest trifle bored by now. Mrs. Poole's color was returning and her terror seemed to be lessening, and determination rising in its place.

"George Dare!" she said.

"Yes?"

"I don't know the roads, and I'm afraid to go alone, or I'd much prefer leaving you here with your friend," Margery said steadily. "As it is, I demand that you take me away from this place instantly! I demand that you take me home!"

"I'm more than willing to do it, Margery! As for you, Miss Woodbury—or whatever your right name may happen to be—I'll ask you to forget that you've ever seen this lady here!"

"I have no doubt that I shall be able to forget you both quite readily," said the cool voice. "You're not particularly interesting, you know, unless one fancies these affairs—and I don't. You're going?"

"At once!" said George.

"Good night, then, and—er—I'm charmed to have had the pleasure of meeting you both, of course. I'd like to ask you to stay longer, because it's rather nasty outdoors, but—"

Her voice trailed away. For the dozenth time, in this last turbulent ten minutes, Miss Woodbury's attention returned to the face of Aunt Amanda's antediluvian clock, over there on the heavy mantel shelf, and she frowned.

And she might go on frowning through all eternity, if she chose! It mattered not to George. Had there been a typhoon raging just then, his sole ambition would still have been to get Margery out of Aunt Amanda's home—at present converted into just what sort of establishment he hardly dared think—before the appearance of Dr. Arthur Poole.

What would happen when that genial scientist arrived, he declined to think. More

than once the name of Margery had escaped his lips. Miss Woodbury would doubtless remember that; her very peculiar mind might prompt her to mention it in the conversation with Dr. Poole which was inevitable. Or she might not remember. Or Poole, having looked her over, might leave before any conversation was possible, if the lady with him really happened to be a mere silly girl. That was another phase which George, probably enough, would have to thresh out with Dr. Poole later on—but making the getaway was the one thing now!

"All ready, Margery?" he asked quietly.

"I have been, ever since we came!" Mrs. Poole said coldly.

"Come on, then, and—"

"Just a minute!" said the cool voice of the painted lady, rising.

They stared at her. Something had shaken the lady out of her remarkable calm. Her eyes were quite startled now.

"That clock," she said. "*It must have stopped at eight!*"

"Eh? Yes, it has been stopping at eight for the last thirty years, I believe," George said. "That's only one of its peculiarities. Give it a good shaking at about five minutes to eight every night, and it goes by the rough spot. Good—"

"They're not coming!" breathed Miss Woodbury.

"I beg pardon?"

"I said—just wait a moment, please!" the lady murmured.

Visibly, because of her expressive eyes, her active brain was working at high speed. It heightened the intelligent effect of her maltreated countenance, too, for an instant sending a pang of real regret through George that one of such obviously good mentality should have fallen so low. Still, he had no time this evening to weep over the mistakes of others; he laid a hand upon Margery's arm—and in the Woodbury brain decision appeared to take sudden, firm shape.

"Er—don't go!" said the lady.

"We have to!" George laughed shortly.

"But you don't, I assure you," Miss Woodbury said quickly. "I want you to stay here for a little while."

"Why?"

"Because—because some friends I expected are very evidently not coming. Have you the correct time?"

"It's about quarter past nine."

"Is that possible?" breathed the painted lady. "Then they've—will you please take off your things?"

"I, at least, will not! I won't stay in your horrible—" Margery began, very harshly.

"Oh, but you will, I'm sure," Miss Woodbury corrected, and her voice was smooth as before. "It's necessary, really. I need somebody here, and the people I expected seem to—well, to have taken fright, I suppose."

"Of what?"

"Oh, people frighten easily, you know," Miss Woodbury smiled evasively. "There is really no cause for alarm. Something amusing is going to happen here, I am almost certain, and I really must have help in watching it! Come! Take off those heavy, wet things!"

Much as she may have loathed him a few minutes back, it is undeniable that Margery drew closer to George Dare—and George, be it said, understood only too well and took an equally precautionary step toward Margery.

Coupled with the hideous overload of paint and all the rest of it, incoherent talk like this meant, almost indubitably, just one thing: a mind deranged! Very frequently, the sanest appearing and most convincing are the most dangerous; it is the plausible, smiling conversationalist, as a rule, who snatches out the concealed knife and creates a vacancy on the asylum's medical staff! So George Dare favored the lady with a very bland and soothing smile and shook his head.

"We'd like to stay, awfully well, of course," he said gently, but firmly, "but we are—er—due elsewhere."

"You were not due elsewhere when you came in here a few minutes ago with your friend!" Miss Woodbury reminded him.

"Oh, but that was different, of course," George purred. "We had no idea that we were breaking in on you, and—"

"Don't misunderstand me, please! I'm

not raving, and I'm not asking you to do anything as a favor," the lady broke in, very impatiently indeed. "I am requesting you to remain because I must have you, and —you've really no choice in the matter, anyhow!"

She was growing violent! She had stamped her foot just then, and her eyes had flashed so strangely. A little low, frightened moan escaped Margery. Miss Woodbury's eye settled upon her—and then Margery Poole shrieked aloud, for with a catlike bound the lady was upon her!

Aye, she had thrown herself headlong at Margery; and just as George, with a dumfounded gasp, was about to throw his arms around her and drag her off before she could do harm, Miss Woodbury had detached herself and was backing away again very swiftly.

And, clutched fast in both her hands, its broken silk cord dangling where it had been snapped apart upon Margery's tender wrist, was the little black silk bag which Margery had carried.

A twitch, and the painted lady's nimble fingers had opened the thing. They were inside now, and snatching out Margery's little gold-mounted cardcase—and some small hint of the move's significance flashed into George's bewildered brain and he stumbled forward. And with another twitch, which involved her whole lithe body, Miss Woodbury had put the living-room table between them! A dozen or more of the cards were in her pink palm now. She held them up to the light and laughed, gently, triumphantly, not at all like a lady whose mental machinery needs the hand of the tinker!

"'Mrs. Arthur Stanhope Poole!'" she read. "Oh, and the address is here, too, isn't it? That makes it simpler."

She tucked the cards into the front of her gown. She glanced quickly at Margery, and, finding her apparently incapable of motion, delved rapidly and without conscience through the other contents of the bag. There was a little gold-encased powder puff, a morocco address-book, and a handkerchief or two; these things Miss Woodbury pushed back and tossed the bag to the living-room table, while she smiled at George and Margery until her perfect teeth gleamed!

"*That* seems to clinch your staying, doesn't it?" she asked.

"I—I want that bag!" Margery faltered. "I'm going, and—"

"But you're not, Mrs. Arthur Stanhope Poole!" the painted lady corrected quite gaily. "You're remaining here until you have my full permission to leave. Not that I can keep you by physical force, of course; but if you *should* insist on going, I give you my solemn word, Mrs. Arthur Stanhope Poole, that Arthur Stanhope Poole himself —what a lovely name that is—will hear the whole story of your visit here, *told my way!*"

## CHAPTER VII.

### FURTHER COMERS.

A VAST proportion of all this seething old world's misery hails from pure misconception; destroy the little acorn of misunderstanding before it can sprout, and the oak of wretchedness can never cast its gloomy shadow upon that particular spot. Taking the case in point, Miss Woodbury believed herself possessed of certain downright disgraceful data concerning Margery and George and their doings this evening.

But that could not alter their utter innocence of anything more dreadful than a desire to punish the erring Arthur. Miss Woodbury, whatever her mode of life, was an intelligent person, and doubtless possessed of a crude sporting sense. She must be made to understand. And then they would go.

Confusedly enough, some such thoughts as these sped through George's aching brain. He braced himself and contrived a patient, tolerant smile. He considered Miss Woodbury critically. If some little excitement had been upon the lady for a minute or two, it was all gone now. She had returned to her perfectly calm, rather inscrutable state once more, and she was regarding George with the same amused confidence.

"Madam," George said bluntly, "you're all wrong!"

"And I've just been congratulating myself that I was very much all right." The painted woman smiled, and tapped the spot over Margery's concealed cards significantly.

"I mean about our errand here. I haven't the time to go into all the details, but our coming isn't the shady affair it seems; in fact, our mission was rather creditable, and if it hadn't been for your own presence it would have worked out nicely. As matters stand, all we ask is to let it drop, and you've no right to prevent that. Poole is coming in a very few minutes, and—"

"Why on earth do you say that?"

"Because I asked him to come, and he said he would."

If he had done nothing else, he had succeeded in annoying the lady. An irritable line appeared between her decorated eyebrows; she raised them, and smiled acidly.

"When you were bringing his wife here, that would have been the natural thing to do, of course. I wish you'd drop that particular line. It isn't at all convincing, you know. The lady's effort at the same thing might have showed you that."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I'm not an imbecile, George, as I said before!" Miss Woodbury said impatiently. "I understand that you have to writhe a little before you settle down here for the evening, but I wish you'd do it intelligently."

"Well, I can't alter the truth because you refuse to believe it!" George said warmly. "I'm trying to show you that you'll wreck at least one family, and possibly two by keeping us here."

"You should have thought of that before you started on the excursion, George," the painted lady sighed. "Accidents will happen, you know."

"Yes, and they always happen to *you*, George!" Margery Poole broke in, quite unexpectedly.

Briefly, George stared at her. Some of her suspicion as to his motive seemed to have departed; she was regarding George now with anger and accusation in her eye—weirdly enough, with almost the same expression that had been in Geraldine's eye this afternoon, just following Deacon's departure. However, he could not pause to refute the unkind statement just now; minutes were passing steadily, and with every one of them Arthur Poole and his wretched woman were coming nearer.

So George turned back to the painted Woodbury lady, and considered her mocking, cynical amusement. He was making no progress at all. He drew breath for another effort.

"What I'm trying to show you is simply that you're endeavoring to take an advantage you really haven't—in justice, I mean," he said forcefully. "We came here on an errand; we should have gone again, having found the house occupied, but that somebody stole my car."

Miss Woodbury started; for a moment a smile of extraordinary brilliance flitted across her beautiful lips.

"Er—yes," she murmured. "That, of course."

George stared blankly.

"Why the 'of course?'"

"I mean," said the lady, and glanced up at the shadowy, beamed ceiling, "that that would be the simple way of explaining the dismissed hack."

"Well, there was no dismissed hack!" George Dare shouted, temper slipping fast. "And I'm not going to stand here all night and let you smirk at me, either. Do you get that? We're leaving!"

"Ah?"

"And if you ever breathe one word of our presence here, I'll make it so hot for you that—"

"Stop, George!" Miss Woodbury said sharply.

George stopped. There was something in those eyes just now that would have stopped a stronger man than George. Indescribably narrowed and keen, they seemed to be slicing through him! They kept on slicing, too, as Miss Woodbury sank into a chair beside the table, rested one bare elbow upon the board, rested her perfect chin upon her closed hand, and smiled, faintly and dreadfully.

"Sit down, George!" she said softly.

"I—"

"Oh, do it, George! Do it!" Margery

pleaded, astonishingly. "I—I never saw a woman look—like that before!"

"I never did myself!" George Dare mumbled, as he dropped limply, dazedly, into a chair.

Their comments, apparently, did not even reach Miss Woodbury; her whole attention was upon her victim. Daintily, she took a gold-tipped cigarette from the little gold case that dangled from her chain; daintily she selected a match from the little stand on the table, and lit the scandalous thing. Then, with plain enjoyment, she blew a soft, aromatic cloud across the table, and smiled again—and George Dare fairly caught his breath, not because of the smoke, but because of the shameless aura that fairly blazed from her!

Why, for sheer disreputability he had never seen her equal, even on the stage; she was the worst of all that can be bad in woman!

And he, however innocently, had been the means of bringing Margery Poole into the same room with—this!

"You're blind, are you not, George?" she asked softly.

"No!"

"Look at me, then—look at me carefully."

"I have been doing that for some time."

"Really? Then how 'hot' do you think you could make things for *me?* You mean notoriety and prosecution, and all that sort of thing, I take it? I wish you'd do something of the kind, George—really. I've been dull lately. And those things I've always found pleasant and—er—profitable in the end."

George said nothing.

"One makes so many valuable friends in court!" the lady added.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Margery Poole.

"Just a minute, Margery!" George said dizzily. "We'll—say, you! I—I take back what I said about making things hot, then! I—"

"Yes, you take back everything, George—and now suppose we stop arguing?" smiled the painted person. "Because, just as surely as I'm sitting here, if you leave me before I'm through with you I'll go in person and call upon Mr. Poole. I'm quite as striking in street clothes as I am now, I assure you. And when I've finished with Mr. Poole, he'll know that his wife visited the home of a really well-known character this evening, and—"

"That's enough!" gasped George.

The lady subsided with a shrug. Brazen beyond description, she merely smoked and gazed absently, abandonedly at him—and some of the trapped, helpless animal's sensations came to George. He had made nothing by argument or an attempt at argument; anger had landed him nowhere, save in this present cold perspiration. And yet they would have to get out—he would have to save Margery, somehow or other!

George breathed hard as he thought. Somewhere in the very worst characters there is bound to be a streak of good; after all, this unspeakable creature must have a better side, which it behooved him to locate in an almighty hurry.

"Miss Woodbury," he said, so gently that he was almost pathetic, "you don't understand. You're accomplishing nothing but the ruining of a woman's happiness."

"You forget. I'm gaining your company."

"For what?"

"For purposes of my own—because I wish you to see something that you may be asked to remember later. My friends seem to have backed out. Accident seems to have presented me with you two. And that's really all; if I cared to explain further I should have done so before this," the remarkable woman said impatiently. "So now—"

"Well, wait!" George said doggedly. "You say you want two witnesses to something?"

"Of course."

"Only two?"

"Only two!" Miss Woodbury smiled serenely.

"Well, you'll have more than that presently, because Poole's coming and somebody is coming with him!" George suggested. "If—"

"I wonder if that really could be so?" the lady murmured, and stared hard at George, and this time she seemed a little disturbed.

"It is so!" George cried, eagerly. "And if two people are all you want—"

"Bosh! Let him come, then!" said Miss Woodbury, and shrugged her shoulders and smiled again. "I can handle him. I've never yet met the man I couldn't handle, and if, by any chance, you should be telling the truth about this Poole person—"

She rose slowly, tilting an ear toward the kitchen, whence came a renewed sizzling.

"You've finished talking, George? Because it doesn't lead anywhere at all, you know—it's bound to go around and around in a circle, and when you've quite finished you'll still be staying with me. Will you excuse me for a moment? Dinner's boiling over, I think."

Beautiful, exquisite in motion, incredible to the last degree, she dropped her cigarette into the little tray and inclined her head coquettishly at George for a moment. Then, humming lightly and contentedly and without one backward glance, she moved to the swinging door of the kitchen and passed it, and they heard the hum change to a lilting song and heard the scrape of a spoon on a copper pot!

George Dare's stunned eyes remained upon the door for many seconds. She, a woman of that kind in a gown that must have cost several hundred dollars—she, one of those field lilies who rarely raise a finger in the direction of menial work—was here without servants, and cooking her own dinner.

Even that trick was almost as confusing as the lady herself; he fumbled for an adequate answer, and gave up the effort almost immediately; he turned his glazing eyes upon Margery Poole.

She was standing in the same spot, trembling, bewildered, frightened out of her very senses. Her lips quivered; her hands stretched piteously toward the person who was helping with her family affairs.

"George! Oh, George!" she breathed.

"She's an—unusual character, isn't she?" George asked thickly.

"And you brought me to her house! *You!*"

"Margery, you can't honestly believe that I ever—" George began.

"I don't know! I don't know! I don't know!" Mrs. Poole cried, softly and wildly, and suddenly rushed to George's side. "Maybe it's just the—the crazy way things happen when you touch them, George, but —I don't know! Only, take me away, George! Take me away from here!"

"This way? When she knows who you are and means to use her knowledge? A woman like that, Margery, is capable of most anything."

"I don't care if she knows my history all the way back to Adam!" Margery cried, hysterically. "We can find a way out of that later, only—take me away before Arthur can find us here!"

"Well, of course, if you want to make a break for it while she's in there, I'm game," George said, and rose quickly. "She's got your cards, but I'll find an explanation for that, if it's necessary, even if I have to wreck myself and lie my soul into perdition."

"And, George—"

"Well, don't stop to talk about it," George said hastily and grimly. "You've got more wits than I have, just now, Margery; the break's the proper thing."

In her present terror, she seemed almost incapable of motion. He took her arm and hurried her to the door.

"I wasn't going to—to talk about that, George," Mrs. Poole murmured, and smiled in a faint, scared, rather insane way. "This is rather important, I think. I want you to promise me, George, that once we're out of here, once you've put me on a train or something, you'll never try to help me again. I thought Geraldine was silly, only last week, but she wasn't. She seemed so angry because you'd tried to fix something for a friend of yours, and it—"

"This is no time to discuss that sort of rot!" George said roughly, and his grip on her arm tightened until it was almost brutal!

But they were past the entrance now, and Miss Woodbury, singing in her kitchen, had not heard and had not followed. They were down the steps and out in the pouring rain, and their feet sank oozily into mud.

Yet for cooling purposes, the mud was on the wrong end of George Dare! His

brain bubbled, with a senseless fury that was partly tension relaxing at their escape.

This was, indeed, his last adventure in giving aid; this clinched it, that a woman in Margery's present position could pause to ask assurance of that kind! With her once off his hands, the whole world might go straight to—whatever place is devoted to the ultimate absorption of plain, thankless fools.

George was quite through. It occurred to him bitterly that perhaps he ought to pause and thank the young woman for having failed to drop senseless in there or to play some other idiotic trick of which she was doubtless capable. She had not; she was still able to walk, and she was plodding on through the mud at his side; there was cause for gratitude in that and, silently, George was about to give thanks, and—

"George!" gasped Margery.

"What?" George asked briefly.

"My handbag!"

"You've got it, haven't you?"

"No, it's in on the table! She threw it there after she took out the cards, and I never gave it a single thought until this very second!"

"Well, it'll have to stay where it is, then. Losing a couple of trinkets is a mighty low price for this getaway, Margery."

"But it isn't losing them!" Mrs. Poole cried, and stopped short. "Arthur's coming, and he'll go in there and see it—and the minute that happens he'll know that I've been there!"

"He'll know nothing of the sort!" George corrected. "No man can tell one handbag from another."

"Arthur can, because he always liked that bag; he gave it to me. And when—when he was himself, he used to—to tickle my chin with the little tassels!" Margery said, and caught a sudden, hard little sob. "Will you go back and get it for me?"

"I will not!" said George. "I don't believe for an instant that Arthur 'll ever recognize—"

"Then you wait here, and I'll go," said Mrs. Poole.

She turned away quickly. George caught her.

"If it has to be done, I'll do it," he said, through gritting teeth. "Stand just as you are, please, so that I can find you when I return!"

She had succeeded, after all, in ruining everything! This George felt in his very bones as he sloshed back, over the dozen yards to the steps of the veranda. He would walk in now and come face to face with Miss Woodbury; and she, doubtless, would have some new and even more convincing way of keeping him there, while Margery waited in the rain. After that? George did not know, nor was he greatly interested. Murmuring divers incoherent and uncomplimentary things, he opened the door and entered Aunt Amanda's home.

The painted lady was not immediately visible. Indeed, as he paused and listened, her song came again from the kitchen, and George stepped quickly to the table and snatched up the wretched bag—and then, because steps were crossing the kitchen, sat down instinctively in the chair he had occupied before! There was the most remote chance that Miss Woodbury—well, there she was, anyway, the kitchen door half opened, a long spoon in her hand, gazing at George with a rather complacent smile.

"I didn't hear you talking," she explained.

"We haven't much to say to each other!" George managed.

"I thought, you know, that you might have fled. That would be so silly!"

And still she loitered, half in and half out of the kitchen, and with no apparent intention of advancing farther just now.

"Silly sounds mild," George submitted, with some difficulty.

"Where *is* the little lady friend, by the way?" Miss Woodbury queried, and looked about curiously.

"Sitting there on the couch," said George, since that was the one bit of living-room furniture not visible from the kitchen doorway. And he smiled at the couch and nodded, very artistically, indeed. "Oh, cheer up, Margery!" he said, with a reckless laugh. "Crying 'll never get us anything!"

"It will not," agreed the painted person dryly. "Not around here this eve-

ning, at all events. Why on earth don't you take off that wet, heavy coat?"

"I—er—will!" George yawned, and rose and went at the buttons!

"And I'll be with you in five minutes, and we'll have a lot more nice, homey conversation before—it happens!" Miss Woodbury concluded. "My entrée's trying to do stunts, and I'll have to coax it for a little. *Au revoir!*"

She disappeared! Her song came again! An informal forefinger dashed away the cold perspiration that was dripping into George's eyes, and he rose cautiously.

But, even now, his path was clear. He had aged, he fancied, about fifteen years in that last two minutes, but his way to the outer world was unobstructed! On tiptoe, George accomplished the door—opened it—closed it gently after him, and was out in the downpour again!

A mighty gasp of relief left his lips. After it came a grim, ugly little laugh. They had made about a dozen yards at that first dash; how much would they make this time before Margery thought up something new or—well, before he himself devised some fresh way of demonstrating his innate idiocy?

A wave of contrition swept over George. After all, it was his own fault that Margery stood there in the rain, health, happiness and everything else imperiled! He sped forward through the mud. He would pick up the poor kid and carry her, and—

"Oh! You're here! You're here at last!" Margery panted.

"I—yes! What's wrong?"

"I'm afraid, George! I'm always so horribly afraid of the dark in the country!

"You were so long that I thought she'd kept you, and I—I'd have died of sheer terror in one more minute. I don't know why, but the woods always—did you get the bag, George?"

"Here in my pocket!" George said cheerily, and tucked her trembling arm through his own. "Don't be so silly, Margery; don't be frightened. I'm not going to leave you alone again. It'll be easier if you'll let me carry you."

"I can walk well enough, just so that—that we're getting away from here," Mrs. Poole sighed, very shakily, and pressed close to him. "Maybe before Arthur gets here we can—"

"Arthur isn't coming at all," George said flatly. "He lost his way or he was called out unexpectedly on a case, or he may have turned back when it began to rain. Anyhow, he's nowhere around here; I have a hunch to that effect, and my hunches are always right. Why, Margery, once I had a good strong hunch that—"

Here George, whose voice was growing just as warm and reassuring as it could grow upon occasion, paused. The immediate reason for the pause was the dull, quick throb of a motor, coming through the rain; and not more than two seconds after the throb's first sound, the faint glare of headlights down there on the roadway.

On came the flare, and still on, just, of course, as it might have come from any one of a thousand passing cars. But there was something strangely familiar about that particular heavy pulsing, something wholly different from the best of the average light country motor, something so different that Margery's hand clawed into George's arm, and she cried:

"That's Arthur now!"

"It—can't be!" George muttered, without a particle of conviction in a tone which seemed suddenly to have lost all its customary warmth.

"But it is, because—oh, look! They're stopping just where you stopped! His brakes are squeaking, just as yours squeaked!"

And they squeaked again, and the big headlights, pointing abruptly up this way, and missing roadway and house by not more than fifty feet as they threw into sharp silhouette the wooden horse across the bridge, came to a standstill.

Dr. Poole owned a big, deep, bass voice which fairly boomed in quiet places. It boomed now through the extremely quiet region about Aunt Amanda's.

"The bridge seems to be closed," it hurled through the rain. "We'll have to make a quick run for the house."

**(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# The Devil's Daughter

by William Merriam Rouse

HUGH SPAULDING knew there was something up when he saw Devil Downey coming along the lake shore, with his powerful body rolling as though to the movement of a boat's deck and his cork arm swinging as stiffly as a dead man from a gibbet. There was always something up when Devil Downey took the trouble to leave his tumble-down house on the cliff. Spaulding had not lived a year on the shore, in a fish shanty, without finding out the habits of his neighbors, even if he did not hobnob with them.

There was an iron hook at the end of the cork arm. Without tangible reason Spaulding hated that hook—hated it as much as he did the little black eyes of its owner, Jim Downey. But then Spaulding was a nervous man with a grouch; so nervous that only the fact that he stood six feet four in his stained and battered shoes made his grouch respected. They pretty well left him alone, all of them—Tite Garneau and Downey, Bat Marble and Tom Strong, and all the rest of the fringe of humanity that lived outside the moral pale of the Lake Champlain village of Presbury.

Devil Downey came up and stopped, and his thin lips cracked in what he undoubtedly intended for a smile. Spaulding nodded, with a grunt of greeting. It was a lowering, thick day, with a sky that meant squalls before night; and Spaulding had let himself go the past twelvemonth until the weather could swing him down into a mood in which he was little short of dangerous. He felt as black as the clouds over the Vermont shore line.

"Hello, neighbor!" said Downey. His voice was charged and surcharged with haughtiness. "Going to be bad on the water to-day!"

"Yes," agreed Spaulding.

"It 'll clear to-night." He threw a confirming glance along the horizon. "But they'll be a sea running and they may be wind."

"Yes."

Downey drew out a pipe and expertly filled and lighted it with his one hand, gazing meanwhile at Spaulding's sloop, the Vixen, which lay at her moorings a few rods offshore.

"Want to make ten dollars with your boat to-night?" he asked.

"No."

Evidently Devil Downey had not expected immediate assent, for although he blinked at the directness of the refusal, neither his voice nor his manner changed. "I kind of need a couple of hours' help"—one eyelid flickered—"and no risk to the man that helps me."

"No," repeated Spaulding.

"I'd go as high as twenty-five dollars!"

"I don't want a job of any kind—to-night or any other night."

The visitor considered this a few mo-

ments in silence; while Spaulding waited for him to go. But he did not; and when he turned from contemplation of the lake to speak again it was without any sign of the suave heartiness of his approach.

"We wouldn't take it friendly, some of the boys and me, if a man was to turn us down flat when we had to have help or—or lose a lot of money."

"Downey," said Spaulding, "I know in a general way what you and your gang are up to, and I don't care a whoop in Hades about it, one way or the other. I won't have anything to do with it—and I want to be left alone."

"Maybe you'll be let alone!" Downey gave a hitch to his shoulders and flung the last words over his shoulder as he started to turn away. "And maybe you won't!"

Hugh Spaulding watched him go, cork arm swinging, with a grim smile. He was utterly indifferent to whatever Devil Downey might choose to do in the way of revenge—because he didn't care. If they should burn his shack or scuttle his boat he would break a few heads and move. It didn't make any particular difference to him whether he lived on the lake or in the mountains, so long as humanity left him alone. He had found that a rather hard state to attain—being left alone.

He saw to it that the Vixen was stoutly moored, against the impending rough weather, and then went to his shanty for dinner: a man had to eat in spite of everything. And Spaulding ate well of lake trout and baked potatoes, after having washed himself with a care that belied his flannel shirt and overalls. The same painstaking neatness was evidenced in and about his one-room home, which sat back above the high-water mark of spring and fall among boulders and stunted firs. It was built of two layers of plank, with tarred paper between, and there was no litter of firewood and fishing gear about the door. Inside the sheet-iron stove was blacked, the blankets of the bunk were folded, and even the books on the shelf near the bunk had been dusted.

Spaulding washed his dishes as soon as he had finished eating and cleared away the last crumb of food while he smoked his after-dinner pipe. Then he went out into the darkening afternoon.

Spaulding's shanty was nearly in the center of a big, open bay which was indented at the southern extremity by a deep and narrow cove. It was over the high, wooded promontory there that most of the summer squalls struck and in that direction his eyes turned as he walked down to the beach to watch the behavior of the sloop.

He saw blackness creeping up the heavens, a whisper of wind along the still waters, and a mist of rain driving toward him. Lightning outlined the crests of the hills. A tow of barges far out in broad lake became hidden.

It was just as the squall struck, lashing the lake into whitecapped rage, that Spaulding's gaze picked up a skiff as it shot out of the cove and into the bay. He muttered a curse at the folly of any man who would leave such protection for the chance of death within the next fifteen minutes. The skiff was hidden. Then he caught glimpses of it as it rode the tops of the waves and drove straight before the wind for his beach. At least the occupant had a little sense, for any attempt to swing off from a straight course would have whipped the frail boat over in an instant.

Spaulding watched, indifferent to the driving rain. He would have to help in the landing or skiff, and possibly boatman also, would be smashed if the craft struck other than on a strip of sand. But in spite of his concentration it was not until the small boat was driving past the Vixen that he caught the flare of a bright red garment through the storm and realized that the skiff held a woman.

If there had been time to think the color would have led him to guess at her identity—but there was no time. He ran into the water, breasted a roller, and hurled himself at the bow of the boat just as it began to swing off preliminary to going over. His weight steadied it; then he and the skiff were thrown far enough up the beach so that he could get a footing.

Half a minute later he had taken an ash oar from blued fingers and was helping a girl, whose red gown ran streams of water, toward his shack. He put her down in a

chair and watched her as he built up a quick fire.

He knew her well enough, although he had never seen her that close before—she was Irene Downey, home from a convent, rumor said, a few months before and already known as the Devil's Daughter. The things that the respectable ones of Presbury said of her were whispered. All Spaulding knew was that he had seen her in company with her father's thugs and that she could run an engine or sail a sloop—he'd seen her doing those things.

Now she sat limply, with her arms hanging and her blue-black hair a sopping mass. From her slenderness it was marvelous that she had been able to hold the skiff before the wind—yet there was an undimmed fire in her defiant eyes that spoke of a powerful will. She was still breathing hard when Spaulding turned from the roaring stove.

"Didn't you know any better than to leave the cove? You must be mad!"

"I wanted to see if I could beat the squall!" She laughed at him between gasps. "Have you got an extra pair of overalls and a shirt?"

Spaulding went silently to a chest, opened it, hesitated, and laid out on the bunk a loose bundle which, under his slightly shaking fingers, resolved itself into a complete set of woman's garments. There was a summer gown of dark blue silk and even small, useless shoes. When he had locked the chest again he found the girl leaning forward, her dark face vivid with interest and her lips parted as though to speak.

"Help yourself," he half growled, "and you needn't bother to return them. I'm going out now for ten minutes."

He slammed the door behind him, and heard the bolt grate as he walked away. The storm was already beginning to abate and it seemed likely that the night would settle down to wind and rough water, as Devil Towney had predicted. Spaulding pulled the skiff farther up and saw to it that the moorings of the sloop had held intact. Then, his ten minutes being up, he knocked upon the door of the shack; and he had been thinking very hard during that interval.

He shuddered at the sight of the girl, standing there as neat and trim as though the blue gown had been made for her. There was high color in her tanned cheeks, and, it appeared to him, the devil's own light in her eyes. He even fancied that he saw mockery in her smile.

"Come in, Mr. Spaulding," she said, "and get dry yourself."

He shrugged, but he walked to the stove, nevertheless, and faced her as he stood steaming beside it. His eyes traveled over her: she had been handsome in red—she was softly beautiful in blue. The thought drew his brows down blackly.

"You're a generous host!" she laughed. "But not a cordial one!"

"No," he replied meditatively.

"The gown fits wonderfully well!"

"Yes—and you are more dangerous in blue, I think."

"You're afraid!" she mocked.

"Not at all." He found himself wondering at her air of good breeding, the intonation of her voice, her *savoir faire;* but he was so sure of himself that he did not feel the need for anything more than the simple denial of her accusation.

"Red is the color of revolt," she said. "Isn't it quite correct for a devil's daughter?"

"Undoubtedly. But for a daughter of the devil with such *finesse* it is rather too dramatic."

"I'll lose all that in time!" Just for a moment the smile passed from her lips. "Twelve years in a good convent is not to be erased by a few months."

"No," he agreed.

"Any more than a year in a fish shanty has erased whatever you were—this woman's gown—"

"Stop!" Immediately he was furious at having shown emotion; he made himself laugh. "You are doing well, but I knew your errand as soon as I got a fair look into your face."

"My errand?"

"Certainly. Devil Towney's daughter takes a long chance to get into apparently accidental contact with me just after Downey has failed to bribe or threaten me into doing a night's work for him."

The snap and crackle of the driftwood fire and the ticking of the cheap alarm clock were the only sounds in the doom for long seconds; while their eyes held together in a battle for supremacy. But Spaulding had thoroughly got hold of himself again and it was he who won in the end. She dropped her assumed look of innocent wonder and laughed defiantly.

"Well! I'm not going to succed, am I?"

"Then you admit it—admit that you came to try to make use of me?" He spoke coldly, with a hint of contempt, and she flared into sudden anger.

"Yes, you big brute! I said I'd get you by any means short of letting you lay hands on me!"

"Aren't you ashamed—but then you wouldn't be ashamed, being a woman!"

"A man didn't hesitate to use me!"

"Nor you to lend approbation to him and his thugs by your association!"

"You—" Her voice broke and the brightness of tears gathered in her eyes. "Who gave me an education and who gives me shelter now? You—you—whited sepulcher!"

"Bah!" He wanted to laugh at such an epithet being applied to a voluntary outcast like himself—wanted to laugh even while he realized that the big drops now rolling down her cheeks were taking hold of him. She was only a disappointed child, after all—or was she weeping designedly.

"Damn it!" he cried. "I'll go!"

"You'll—what?"

"I'll go! Tell Downey to give me his orders and I'll play the fool to his heart's content!"

"Then you aren't afraid?"

"Afraid?" he roared. "No! I'm going merely to get rid of you!"

She gasped; and her little fists clenched white in fury. With the tears yet undried upon her cheeks she ran to the door.

"I hate you!"

The door slammed and Spaulding was alone with the red dress and a little heap of soggy garments. Alone with the feeling that his emotions had been stirred by a splintery stick.

Why hadn't he remained calm, and put the girl out, and kept himself aloof from Downey's affairs? Why did a man always get the worst of it when he allowed himself to have anything to do with a woman?

Hugh Spaulding cursed himself inwardly and aloud as he changed to dry clothing; and he grew no better satisfied with himself as the day wore on and supper time came and went. He was still muttering an occasional imprecation upon what he chose to call his stupidity that evening as he sat in his doorway smoking while darkness settled down over the rolling, wind-harried lake.

A spatter of clouds dimmed the stars now and then, but there was just enough light, and not too much, for the kind of work that Devil Downey would be up to.

Spaulding was chewing his pipe stem in an excess of discontent when a step on the gravel caught his quick ear: there was the flutter of a skirt in the wind and then Irene Downey stood before him, wrapped in a big and almost obliterating sweater.

"Are you ready?" she asked coldly.

"Yes, but—"

"I'm to go with you and give directions—please don't think that I like the prospect any better than you do!"

He had risen as soon as he saw who it was; now he knocked out his pipe, closed the door of the shanty, and led the way down to where the Vixen's trailer lay pulled up on the beach. He waved his companion into the little craft, with barely a touch of his fingers against her sleeve, and then ran the boat into the water as easily as an ordinary man would have handled it empty.

"You're too much of a man for this," she said as he leaped over the gunwale and seized the oars.

"That's amusing—from a woman!" he growled; and at once was filled with self-hatred for his churlishness and for the implication of things untold. He was not in the least pitying himself for the situation—he liked it.

Until the moorings had been cast off and the sloop was standing out toward the broad lake there was too much to do to permit of conversation. The girl helped as well as a man, and with a surprising

strength. For that he was glad, because in any business in which Devil Downey was concerned there was no room for ornaments.

"Now," began Spaulding, as he flung a leg over the tiller and cleated down the main sheet, "tell me what I'm to do."

She had curled up out of the way in the cockpit, with her back against the side of the cabin near the companionway.

But he had been obliged to shout to make her hear, and she evidently thought it necessary to move to a locker at his side.

"The wind has shifted into the north," with her tangle of hair close to his ear, "and that helps us. You are to stand on and off the point just beyond the cove and I'm to watch for a motor-boat running down before the wind without lights. Then—then you'll give me the tiller!"

"I will, will I?" he asked grimly. "And should I carry lights?"

"Yes, you will!" She laughed very softly. "And no, you should not carry lights!"

After all, he asked himself, what difference did it make if he did give her the tiller? From what he had seen of her he thought her capable of handling the Vixen—and what if she did get him into trouble? Wasn't he an intimate acquaintance of trouble?

So they sailed on, leaning up against the slant of the deck and swaying with the pitch of the sloop. They made the point and he came about, tacking back and forth thereafter as she had directed. For a long time neither of them spoke, while the wind blew keen and sweet in their faces and they watched the tossing darkness for a darker spot and listened for the *put-put* of a motor.

"Whose clothes were those?" The words were thrust so swiftly and so insinuatingly into his consciousness that he answered without thought.

"My wife's, damn her!"

"Oh!" It was a little cry of apology, but the inquisition persisted. "Is she—"

"She's dead," he interrupted. "What else?"

"Why did you give them to me?" The girl spoke boldly now, trying to probe out whatever was in his mind.

He recognized the desire, and laid it at the door of woman's curiosity.

"Because I was sure I was cured!"

"And so—and so—"

"And so I don't like any of you!" he shouted. "Woman, why don't you let me alone? I'm not a duke in disguise or a noble creature with a mysterious past! I lost some money, pretty nearly all I had, and my wife couldn't stand it—she quit me for one of my friends! Stripped down to the bones, that's all there is to the sordid mess. I've learned she's dead. And she's the reason why I don't like any of you. You're quitters! You don't stick! I never heard of one who did who didn't have something in sight to gain! Now will you keep quiet?"

"Yes," she answered quite simply, "for I've found out what I wanted to know."

He had to smile to himself at that, bitterly as he ached with the pain of roused memories. She'd got what she wanted, and like the rest of them she never would have been satisfied without it. He realized now that he had been held a little by the fascination of her personality; but he told himself that she had killed this and that he thanked her for it.

Not until she gave a low cry of warning did he break his reverie. Then he caught a lifting hull off the port bow, and apparently on a course that led straight toward the cove.

The slim but frantic hands took the tiller from his grasp, and he moved out of the way quickly. Devil Downey's daughter, leaning forward intently, held the sloop a little closer to the wind and headed directly across the bows of the oncoming boat. If they missed a crash it would be by the length of a man's arm.

The man at the wheel of the motor-boat had two alternatives: he could swing off to port or starboard and wallow in the trough of the sea, certainly shipping water and perhaps killing his engine; or he could risk his life by holding a straight course. He chose the latter. The long, narrow boat shot straight down from the crest of a wave, shaved the stern of the Vixen, and

carried away her rudder even as Spaulding with a low cry involuntarily flung his arm around the girl. The tiller had jammed over at the impact, pressing her hard against him; and for an instant both of them lay breathless against the coaming of the cockpit.

In the next ten seconds things happened with dazing rapidity. The boat that had grazed the Vixen cut her way straight onward toward the mouth of the cove and disappeared from view, but the fragment of a curse that came up against the wind made Spaulding think, even then, that she had not gone scathless. And just before she drove out of sight toward the sheltered inlet the coughing of another motor came to the ears of those in the sloop. A third boat crossed their bows, heading straight up into the wind—north—toward Canada.

Spaulding, in the brief moment it took to right himself, had time to think and to note the situation. He drew his knife, glanced toward the darkly outlined shore, and slashed the main sheet to the accompaniment of a cry from Irene Downey.

Then, as the boom straightened out with a ripping crack, he sprang forward and cut the halyards, throat and peak. The gaff slumped down; and the Vixen, all her steady beauty of movement gone, began to stagger and pitch and drift toward the mouth of the cove.

"We'll either make shelter or we'll break up on the rocks," he shouted, after he had worked his way back to the side of the crouching girl. "If I hadn't have let her drift we'd have gone on the rocks certainly—there isn't a safe place to beach her in this wind within half a mile of here."

He knew, of course, that they faced death; and he knew that she knew it. He took a kind of cruel pleasure in watching her, as well as he could, to see whether she were breaking under the strain—for it was a strain to sit helpless and wait to see whether wind and waves and the Vixen would carry them into the haven of the untroubled cove or to the jagged shore line on either side.

Some women would have been inert by now, and some would have torn at him with frantic hands. His own calmness he attributed to indifference, and not to bravery. But with her it was not the same—she must have some desire to live for, whether it might be good or evil. Yet she sat bending forward, peering into the night, without any evidence of terror.

"You are too much of a woman for this sort of thing," he said, at length, paraphrasing her words of the earlier evening. He was rather astounded that he had spoken, and like that. For really, he told himself, he did not consider her any better than any other woman.

She turned her face toward him, and he fancied that she smiled.

"That's complimentary—from you!" And she actually found time to laugh as the sloop swerved, pitched desperately, headed toward the white, thundering rocks—and then slipped almost gracefully through the entrance to the cove. The Vixen, as though tired with having done her utmost, drifted broadside to the choppy little seas of the inlet and came to rest sloppily upon the sand of a fretful beach.

Spaulding went over the side at once and began to work hurriedly to make the boat fast. By the light of a tiny lantern which he gave into the hands of the girl he got out his anchor, and then ran a line from the mast to a tree on shore. Not until this had been done did he give any heed to their surroundings, or to his companion other than to snap orders at her. Now, satisfied with his labor, he considered the night and became aware that a fire was beginning to burn up among the trees a few hundred yards back from the water. The hand of Irene took him by the sleeve.

"Come," she said. "Father should be up there."

He hesitated, assured himself that he was moved only by curiosity, and permitted her to lead him toward the brush fire, against the light of which a handful of stout forms were outlined. As they advanced he picked out the members of the group—Downey, with his solidity and his hooked arm; the raw-boned, stooping giant, Tom Strong; and quick moving Tite Garneau. There was also Bat Marble, robust and handsome in profile against the fire.

Devil Downey heard them and spun

around as they moved side by side into the circle of illumination. Spaulding experienced a curious feeling of pride in the girl as she stood beside him, wet, disheveled and flashing the triumph of success from her dark face.

"The Gull showed her heels to the sheriff," she announced, "and he's beached here in the cove, I think. Thanks to Mr. Spaulding—and you owe him for a smashed rudder, dad!"

There was a muttering of approval. Devil Downey smiled his cracked smile.

"Sheriff Hardy will be able to find us as soon as he sees the fire we've lighted for him," said the leader. "Meantime—"

A bellow which Spaulding recognized as that peculiar to big-girthed Sheriff Bill Hardy drowned the words of Devil Downey; and the sheriff, backed by two deputies armed with rifles, crashed out of the brush.

"In the mean time the cussed boat got off with the load of booze you was hoping to land!" Hardy paused to level an accusing and trembling finger at Spaulding. "Thanks to Hugh Spaulding, the loafer! We don't want you around Presbury, Spaulding, any more than we want Downey and his gang! And I'm going to get you first of all just to pay for this night's work."

Spaulding grinned cheerfully; he rather liked to have a man of the sheriff's type bellow at him, and while he, in sober judgment, would have been with those enforcing the law, he now took a kind of perverse pleasure in posing with Downey.

"Do you hear that, Downey?" he cried. "Aren't you proud of me?"

"You fouled our steering gear!" cried Hardy. "We had 'em bottled up here if you hadn't cut in!"

"A sail boat has the right of way—isn't that so, Mr. Sheriff?"

But Hardy had passed beyond power of adequate rejoinder. Fairly swelling with rage he turned and strode off in the general direction of the village, his men crashing along behind him.

"You've made an enemy!" exclaimed Irene.

"You mean another enemy!" laughed Spaulding.

"And he's made a clean fifty dollars," interposed Downey, with a narrow gaze that passed from the girl to Spaulding and back again, "if he knows enough to keep his mouth shut and—and keeps his feet on the ground!"

Hugh Spaulding believed the inference to be that he must not dare to lift his eyes to Devil Downey's daughter; therefore, he deliberately insulted the one-armed chief.

"I keep my mouth shut because it's a habit," he said, "and I don't want your money. But if there's anything I do want I'll take it!"

He said this, looking at Downey. For an interval neither man shifted hand or foot or eye; then Spaulding turned to the girl and carelessly tucked a trailing end of her scarf over her arm.

"Come, Miss Downey," he said. "I'll have to take you home by the road, and it's a long way."

That broke the spell that had held them all—Strong and Tite Garneau and Marble. They started forward as one, but it was Marble who first came within striking distance of Spaulding.

Bat was in the act of launching the foul body blow for which he was notorious when Spaulding stepped toward him and a little to one side. The blow went past, he placed his arms around the smuggler and grinned into his face as the impetus of the attack carried them both out of immediate range of the others.

Of his gang only Devil Downey kept his head. It was the iron hook at the end of his cork arm that drew Bat Marble, raging incoherently, out of the grasp of Spaulding, and his voice that stayed Tom Strong and Tite Garneau.

"Wait!" he cried. "I'm the one that's got accounts to settle with this cuss, and I'll do it so they won't be no afterwards!"

Spaulding met Downey's eyes and then turned deliberately away, still smiling. He had gone perhaps a dozen yards when he heard swift feet behind him, a gruff, quick command from Devil Downey to halt—and then Irene was at his side, breathing hard.

"Thank you, Mr. Spaulding," she said. "I'll be very glad to have you take me home!"

There was no pursuit, but Spaulding knew that the girl, by her defiance of Downey, had stored up a tenfold vengeance against himself.

For a long time they walked in silence; out of the woods and along the road that followed the contour of the bay. Spaulding had no desire to talk—no desire because he was deep in a gloom of self-condemnation for the part he had played that day. Fool and weakling he called himself; fool to have been led into a clash both with the officers of the law and the gang of Devil Downey; and weakling to have permitted the girl to prick him through the skin. For she had done that. He liked to walk there beside her in the wind-filled night.

"I want to thank you!" She was speaking to him very meekly. "I want to thank you for having taken care of me—treated me as you have—after I—"

"Don't talk to me!" He flung her hand from his arm in a rush of blind anger.

"Hugh!" The word, pain-filled, was wrung from her suddenly; a confession and a cry for mercy. But because of his own suffering he made his ears deaf to it.

"You!" he choked. "If that vicious Marble had cut my face to ribbons and kicked my ribs in would you call me Hugh now? No! Damn you, you want a man who always wins! I can win when I choose. But if I were broken down by anything, what woman would stick to me? Bah!"

After that neither of them spoke, not even when he left her in front of the Downey house. He went away quickly, shaping his course toward the shack on the beach, although without care whether he went there or over the cliff to death on the wave-swept rocks.

Without lighting a lamp or making up his bunk he threw himself face downward upon the blankets. The open door swung in the wind. The dark night grayed to dawn and then brightened to full day; while Hugh Spaulding remained motionless. He had hurt the thing he loved. And although he told himself that he had done this in self-defense, that he might not be betrayed as he had been before, he was able to drive away no part of his sickening remorse.

What right had to demand perfect loyalty, or perfect anything? And, for the first time, he felt that he had been playing the traitor to himself during this past year of bitter hostility to the world he had known.

Life must go on, unless he wished to end it altogether, and so with daylight he got up and prepared to recover the sloop; provided Downey's gang had not taken out a part of their revenge upon the boat. He found her, somewhat to his surprise, unharmed except for the damage done in the collision with the motor-boat; and he began at once the painstaking although not difficult task of repairing the rudder. He lunched in the cabin, and as he found that his work would not be done much before dark, prepared to anchor in the cove and spend the night on board. The wind still held and the seas were running higher than the night before; so that it would be difficult to pick up his moorings in the darkness.

He smoked late, sitting in the gently rocking cockpit and listening to the pound of the water outside the cove. To-morrow he would go back to the shanty and before another night had come he would be on his way to the life he had thought to give up forever on his way to work and serve as he was best fitted to work and serve without thought of what life might give him in return. And with that decision at last firmly planted in his mind he was able to grasp a certain degree of peace. Happiness he did not expect; for, despite the greatest effort of his will, the girl whom he had affronted the night before remained inextricably bound up with his happiness. His wife had killed the love he bore her; he wished that Irene Downey would do the same—and at once regretted the wish.

Spaulding's ear did not pick out from the sounds of the night the very faint noise of a padded oarlock until it was too late. When he jerked his head around, a skiff had thudded lightly against the starboard quarter and a man was vaulting to the sloop's after deck. There was another skiff within an oar's length of the stern.

Instantaneously Spaulding's mind accounted for the four human figures that he saw—Downey, Garneau, Strong, and the hated Marble. He swung his arm, stopped it in mid air, and sent the fire and ashes from his pipe bowl into the face of the man who had vaulted on board. The curses of that unfortunate broke the silence and the battle was on.

Spaulding seized the gunwale of the first skiff and with a great heave emptied it of its remaining occupant. But by that time the second boat had reached the sloop, and he turned to receive a blow that sent him reeling back to the cabin companionway.

Marble and Downey had been in the second skiff, and it was Marble who had struck. That fact loosed the bonds of the big man's fighting spirit and he launched himself at them regardless that the odds were two to one with probable reenforcements coming to the enemy.

In spite of a stunning blow from that murderous hook of Devil Downey, Spaulding got Marble down in the bottom of the cockpit and stood on him with a fierce exultation as he went after the leader.

Tite Garneau, who had got the tobacco out of his eyes, sprang into the fray now; and Tom Strong drew himself out of the water. Spaulding marked them coming as he struggled to break through the defense of Downey before they could reach him from the flank or rear. Even this he might have done if it had not been for the cork arm, which moved always as an arm would not be expected to move and which dealt an iron-shod blow more effective than half a dozen from an ordinary fist.

Downey had been driven aft so that he was due to meet disaster against the swinging tiller in his retreat when the hook struck home above and behind one of Spaulding's ears. He had just an infinitesimal fraction of time in which to understand what had happened; then his legs dissolved and he sank into unconsciousness.

Through pain and nausea and a feeling of utter helplessness Hugh Spaulding struggled back to a misty awakening. The little hanging lamp told him that he was lying on the deck of his own cabin before his painfully moving eyes went about the familiar place and found it empty. From the slant of the deck and the pound of water against a nearly motionless hull he knew that the Vixen had struck. It was still night—were they leaving him there so that he would drown when the sloop broke up? Surely that was absurd, for she might not go to pieces at all and in any event his bound hands and feet would cry murder.

The sound of voices ended his difficult attempt to think. He closed his eyes and two men came down into the cabin a moment afterward; to identify themselves immediately by their words.

"He ain't come to yet, Bat," said Devil Downey, "but he will. And then we'll finish up and beat it, for it ain't long to daylight."

"Yes," agreed Marble. "Have a drink?" The clink of glasses followed and a smacking of lips.

"Did the Gull get her whole load off and up to your house?" asked Marble.

"The whole hundred gallons is down cellar and hid under the potato bins!" chuckled Downey. "The boys on board the Gull done the whole thing. You see, I figured if we made a bluff to land in the cove and then stalled the sheriff there so he'd see us all ready and waiting he'd sure think the Gull had gone back to Canada with her load. And he did. He's been hunting all around the south shore to find where we planned to store the stuff!"

Now Spaulding understood how he had been used to make sure of the Gull's escape so that she could make the landing really intended. He opened his eyes unconsciously, and found himself staring into those of Devil Downey. The leader indulged in a grin.

"Pretty good crack I give you?" He picked up a glass from the table. "Want a drink, hey?"

"Water!" said Spaulding, and even then marveled at such apparent kindness. He watched Downey turn away and heard the sound of water running from the little tank. That brought uppermost in his mind the intensity of his thirst and when the glass reached his lips he drained it in eager gulps and let his head fall back afterward with

a feeling almost like gratitude toward the man who had succored him.

Then in his mouth a taste made itself felt and in his nostrils there was a smell. He could not at once place that combined odor and taste, but he knew it had never come from his water tank, and his eyes sought, questioning, the faces of the others.

He read satisfaction, the look that victors have for a beaten enemy, and then he was conscious that a feeling of rest and peace was dimming his quick alarm, taking away the edge of his pain, and even touching a little the clarity of his vision. Was he going to sleep? That taste was still on his tongue and, just as the dimming face of Bat Marble laughed at his impotence, he found a name. Chloral hydrate—a big dose.

Hugh Spaulding's second return from oblivion was at first wholly pleasant. Too heavy with numbing sleep to move, his brain first became active, and one after another impressions registered themselves until he had a fairly accurate understanding of his condition.

His face was lying against sunlight-bathed sand, for one thing; and he knew by his position that he was no longer tied. Water splashed gently somewhere at his back. It was calm, therefore, and beautiful. If it had not been for a reek of stale whisky in the air he would have been quite content to go to sleep again. That annoyed him so much that he would have been willing to get up and lie down in another place if he could have moved his leaden body—but he could not stir even a finger. A broken bottle lay near.

Some one moved him. Strong hands turned him over on his back, and the face of Sheriff Hardy appeared before his half-closed eyes. The sheriff's thumbs pressed back his lids urgently.

"Dead drunk," announced Hardy.

"I don't believe it!" rang fiercely in Spaulding's ears; and that part of his being which was alive responded to the presence of Irene. She knelt beside him; he saw her hazily, and then she sat down and pillowed his head in her lap.

"Get up, girl!" That was Devil Downey speaking. "Don't you know this pup is caught with the goods? He's got drunk and wrecked his sloop, and the officers have caught him with half a dozen cases of whisky in the cabin! When he gets sober it's going to be in jail! Ain't that so, sheriff?"

"He'll get more than jail if I can fix it!" growled Hardy. "And don't think you ain't going to get caught sooner or later, Downey! I ain't got any evidence on you now, but I'd bet five dollars you had a hand in beating Spaulding up!"

"Come on home, Irene!" urged Downey. "Can't you see he's done for? What do you want of a bum like him?"

"He is drunk," said Irene Downey slowly. "I can smell it!"

"You better mind your father, and behave yourself," advised the sheriff.

"My stepfather," she corrected, "and neither God nor man has given you any right to interfere in my affairs, Mr. Sheriff!"

"This fool is a bum!" cried Downey. "You're wasting time!"

When she had agreed that he was drunk Spaulding's mind had quivered to exquisite torture; and then, as he fought with all the power of his will to rouse himself, he wondered whether it were not better that she should continue to think so. But he struggled on toward control of himself, and he had succeeded in opening his lids wider when she answered the latest urge of Devil Downey.

"He's drunk, and he's going to jail, and he's made a fool of himself, no doubt," she said slowly, "but nobody on earth is going to prevent me from sticking to him. I'm going to stick through hell and high water, Mr. Sheriff, so do your worst!"

Then Hugh Spaulding found utterance, thick though his words were, and he spoke slowly from his resting-place in her arms.

"Look—under Downey's—potato bins, sheriff! A hundred gallons—I'll straighten out the rest—later on!"

Spaulding realized vaguely that the others went away in a riot of cursing protest, but he cared nothing for that. What he cared for was that the arms of Irene cradled him and that her lips sought his.

# The House of the Echo

by Raber Mundorf

Author of "When Ludlow Street Laughed," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

## CHAPTER I.

### A "WITCH" GOES WALKING.

THE Petrograd Inn, situated squarely in the center of Manhattan's Russian quarter, might reasonably be supposed to have a Russian flavor. During the quite recent period of which I speak, however, there was nothing characteristically Russian about it—save, perhaps, a few Slavic items which the Irish chef reluctantly placed upon the bill of fare.

To those transplanted people of "All the Russias," who dwelt north of Houston Street and off Avenue A, the hotel was better known as the "House of the Echo," and seemed to have been an object of suspicion and—among the more primitive-minded—of superstitious dread. The source of its patronage was a mystery; certain it is that the immediate neighborhood contributed no guests to the inn.

Indeed, the very appearance of the Petrograd Inn was not a little disconcerting. From the two upper stories—which were in smooth white stucco with window-frames enameled white—to the lower story of red brick and light-oak-finished woodwork, the hotel's windows were unbroken and the panes spotless; shades and curtains neatly kept; and viewed from a distance, it seemed a quaint, inviting establishment where one might obtain capital bed and board.

But seen at close range, the paint appeared discolored, blistering and peeling; the wood rotting; bricks crumbling; while across the stucco were revealed great, crawling dark splotches that came out like a dank sweat or a shocking skin affection.

The contrast startled the observer. Here seemed disease or decay in frantic disguise; as might be, roguery—dissembling hospitality and respectability—luring prospective patrons into its toils.

Still, if superstitious persons found the House of the Echo creepily repellant and muttered a prayer as they fearfully went by, they had been known even to turn back and go another way, at sight of the mistress of the "House."

None but the "Echo" ever occupied the long, low-roofed porch. Stiffly straight and motionless in her black rocker, this mysterious, elderly woman sat grimly as death—and terrified the passers-by almost as badly.

"See the old witch hatching mischief," one would whisper to the other.

Few had seen the Echo's face. It invariably was hidden by a heavy black veil—in keeping with her costume of unrelieved black; a black without sheen, smoothness or definition, but vague of outline and dull as crape. Yet—here again was incongruity—the dress, probably a sort of chiffon, reflected in its fashioning almost that jaunty smartness which belongs to youth.

And, when she walked, the Echo's car-

riage was splendidly erect and graceful, her tread firm; and the ebony staff with the gold-mounted head which she carried, became not a rod for support, but—as it were—a wand or badge of office.

All very theatrical, perhaps, but nevertheless, quite distressing to those shuddering, credulous folks who mumbled: "The devil takes care of his own." Doubtless the Echo was not unobservant of the effect produced. She seemed in no wise displeased at the neighborhood's wholesome fear of her and her House.

Meantime, while people suspected much, they knew nothing—not even why this dreaded woman was called the Echo; a name handed down to them through the years.

Astonishing reports, some of which bore the stamp of truth, were circulated later. But these came long after a certain drowsy, Indian summer afternoon when the Echo was maintaining on the porch—her solitary watch, or deeply meditating, as the case might be.

Presently the Echo's black chair did an unprecedented thing. It started to rock. Slightly, but perceptibly, it moved to and fro. The cynical indifference which a moment before had appeared on her countenance became modified a shade by recognizable curiosity. She rapped smartly on the floor with her cane.

Like a Jack-in-the-box, a plump little man with glistening white teeth and a tiny, oily goatee, popped through the door and stood at attention before her.

"Charles," she inquired irritably, as though impatient with herself for asking the question, "why is Alan Dmitrieff so often on this street?"

Her eyes followed a tall young man who, having come from Joe Benigno's tonsorial parlor, and seemingly intent upon an important errand, had passed rapidly by the inn.

"Dmitrieff is pursuing the young lady of the Ukrainian bookshop," smiled the Echo's Chief of Information, gently dry-washing his hands.

"Humph!" snorted the woman, contemptuously; then nodded dismissal of the plump one.

The black chair continued to rock—now slowly, now a little faster. Rising, after a while, the Echo stepped from the porch and walked in the same direction the young man had taken.

A golden haze such as dreams are made of flooded this mellowly autumnal afternoon. On the green benches in the patches of rear-tenement courts—visible through front hall-ways or alley-ways—young lovers obviously were yielding to the spell of Indian summer's soft enchantment. The Echo silently condemned them for idiots.

She found neither humor nor pathos in the spectacle of little Natalya, the broom maker's wife, puzzling over a newly-bought cook-book while she wheeled a baby-coach along the sidewalk. Only recently had Natalya quitted her machine in the knitting "mill" and taken to trundling a baby carriage; therefore she had much to learn. But the girl-wife paused long enough in her reading to snatch up the coverlet and lay it over her baby's face at the Echo's approach.

So, between the rows of brick and stone tenements and huddles of old-fashioned brick shops and dwellings with their ragged, uneven sky-lines, this scornful woman who was reputed a "witch" took her way. She passed the employment agencies for Russian, Polish, and Hungarian servants; the basement bookbindery, and the popular dental parlor; and finally entered the little Ukrainian bookshop.

The clerk, Sophia Nikolai, after a polite inclination of her head, remained tactfully unobtrusive as the Echo stepped toward shelves filled with books in Russian and in Ukrainian.

If the visitor understood not a word of the volume of Schevchenko which she held open—upside down—in her hand, this mattered little. Her actual scrutiny was reserved for the girl, not the book.

Sophia's demeanor ordinarily was that of quiet gravity. To-day she seemed upset. There were traces of tears, hastily wiped away; more than a suggestion of fright and perplexity. Furthermore, on the near by table lay, neglected, her unfinished work; artistic drawn thread work and charming painting on pottery, which the Russian

*koustars* might well have envied, and with which usually she employed her leisure moments.

"Too busy moping about her sweetheart!"

The Echo, glancing toward the table, had lifted her veil and commented audibly in a cutting tone and with a manner that in anyone else would have been an impertinence.

"What is the trouble? Quarreled with him, I presume," almost sneered this queer, elderly woman who never before had spoken to the girl of the bookshop.

Although Sophia's head—crowned with its wavy black locks—came barely to the chin of her visitor, she dignifiedly made the most of her scant inches. And her soft dark eyes were fixed resentfully on the Echo's cold, patrician features as she protested: "I have quarreled with nobody." But she could not meet the challenging, piercing gaze. A will stronger than hers drew the confession:

"I am in *great* trouble, *Barina*."

"If you can speak English, speak it," said the other, irascibly.

The confused Sophia apologized immediately. So many customers used only Russian or Ukrainian, she explained. Then, apparently determined to keep her own counsel, she closed her lips tightly. Again they were unlocked by force of the Echo's will, and the words stumbled out:

"Ten dollars has gone from the cash drawer. I do not know what to do. It will take me a long time to pay ten dollars. And Peter Rostoff will not be patient or lenient."

The Echo knew—as she knew most things—that Peter was a crusty old fellow who idled away most of his time, smoking in the cider saloon or discoursing with his crony, the manufacturer of butchers' coats and aprons—while he left Sophia practically in entire charge of the bookshop. Undoubtedly, it *would* go hard with the girl.

"Other girls, whose hands don't seem as quick or clever as yours, have no trouble in raising ten dollars—and more," significantly said the Echo. "I believe there is some risk; still, with caution, police and prison often seem to be avoided—and where do you find gain, without risk? Are you afraid of prison; my dear?"

The bookshop clerk trembled and paled as she listened to the hard, dry, contemptuous voice that thrilled by some uncanny power. Yet she responded courageously to the sarcastic taunt.

"I *am* afraid of prison. But I would rather go to jail now, than do what you suggest!"

The Echo lifted her eyebrows. "I suggest nothing," she said, in amusement. Then, turning upon the girl, she demanded sharply:

"Haven't you relative—friend—sweetheart—who could help you out of this difficulty?"

In spite of a struggle to keep silent, the girl found herself stammering:

"Some day I am to marry Alan Dmitrieff, who works for his uncle Boris, at the Nevski Accordion Factory. But old 'Uncle' Boris can afford to pay very little, and Alan has so much to do with his money. He has genius—is studying to become a great musician. That takes money. No; I would not ask Alan for a penny."

Apart from worry over her predicament, the emotional strain engendered in her bewildering conflict with the Echo had brought Sophia to the verge of tears. She was almost ready to believe that this mysterious old woman was what the neighborhood termed her—a "witch."

Obviously unconcerned about the girl's distress, and following upon a reflective silence, the Echo questioned:

"Does this Alan Dmitrieff play the violin?"

"He is a violinist, although he plays piano and other instruments," was the reply, in a choked voice.

The Echo nodded, then observed caustically:

"There's no use of anyone whining over a ten-dollar bill. However, you seem quite helpless. Take this ten dollars—and pay me back in your own time. Say nothing to anyone about it. Absolutely nothing, you understand!"

The dazed Sophia found herself alone in the bookshop with a ten-dollar note in her hand, and wondering exactly how it had

got there. Finally she came to the conclusion that a witch was an angel in disguise.

Unquestionably, the Echo would have been somewhat amused at being classified with angels. Ten dollars probably seemed to her a fair price for satisfying curiosity.

## CHAPTER II.

### DANCING TO THE ECHO.

EVERY so often, a much-besought moon and a galaxy of temperamental stars gave promise of appearing at scheduled time to help light up the community ballroom—otherwise identified as the schoolyard, west of Avenue A.

Then the municipally-hired bandsmen sauntered in with lofty condescension; discussed among themselves many private matters; and tuned and tested their instruments with precision and deliberation. After these and other preliminaries, they played.

Still, it all was worth waiting for—as any skeptic would have been convinced, had he beheld the grand expanse of smooth pavement crowded with happy, enthusiastic dancers, and the yard enclosure filled with appreciative music-lovers—all ages, from toothless grandmas to infants as toothless, being fitly and fully represented.

A public dance in the neighborhood schoolyard might be the last place where one logically would look to find the mistress of the House of the Echo. Many a time the extraordinary woman strolled over to attend this function, however; occasionally remaining through all the folk dances, and for the Russians' beloved Tchaikovsky—early on the program—to the American national air at the conclusion.

She stood far in the background, and alone, which better pleased the other spectators.

Many said that music was the Echo's hobby; that from it she derived intellectual rather than emotional enjoyment—much as Joseph Yaroslav, the spade-bearded glazier, delighted to ponder over chess problems while, between moves, he munched his *kulick* and drank his coffee at the bakers' exchange coffee house.

Others, less kindly, intimated that she came in order to oversee certain strangers; young men and women who, mingling with the throng, labored (so gossip reported) to secure recruits for knavery.

While disregarding all hearsay, it cannot be denied that this Saturday evening—of the day of the bookshop incident—the Echo keenly watched the dancing of two young persons in particular.

Both were unknown to the neighborhood. One was a radiantly clothed, breezy-mannered youth whose most recent alias was Michael Kazan; the other—a somewhat skimpily, but expensively attired young woman, handsome in a bold way—answered to the name of Zelda Carter. At first they danced together, then separated to seek partners among the crowd of spectators.

By and by, the Echo was interested to see Kazan accost Sophia Nikolai, who, wishing an hour's recreation, had come unattended to the yard. The girl of the bookshop apparently refused Kazan a dance. Nevertheless, he persisted—until she turned from him, in indignation.

To-night the Echo's stay was short. Before she left, however, she spoke in a low tone to Michael Kazan, as he passed carelessly by her in his meanderings. Soon, Kazan also vanished.

Subsequently he knocked at the door of that room, on the second floor of the inn, which to the initiated was known as the "office."

The Echo—always in black—sat in a straight, high-backed chair at her massive, ebony-finished desk that resembled a council table. She looked meditatively at Kazan.

"I'm curious to know," she said slowly, "why you wouldn't take 'no' for an answer, from that girl who—as I suppose you're aware—is clerk at the Ukrainian bookshop."

"Had reason to believe she would be interested," was the evasive response.

Now busying herself about the desk, the Echo continued in a matter-of-fact tone: "It was you, then, who lifted the ten dollars from the bookshop till."

Kazan, grinning shamefacedly, did not dispute the statement. The grin faded, however, when the Echo lifted her eyes.

"Any time you need a bit of change—say, the price of a child's rattle, Kazan," she said witheringly, "you come to me, and I'll lend it to you—as long as you're stopping at my House."

She calmly went on: "You will return the money immediately, with some ingenious excuse. It won't do you any harm to exercise your brain a little, as well as your fingers. And—remember this, Kazan—you will make no further overtures to the girl."

The aggrieved young man opened his mouth as though to expostulate. Instead, his jaw only bobbed up and down mutely.

For the Echo had leaned forward. And her eyes—which possessed the odd trick of narrowing to a slit and then suddenly dilating to the full—seemed to spit a fire before which the luckless offender appeared blasted, shriveled.

Trembling violently, his forehead beaded with perspiration—the man apparently was spun about by some unseen agency. He stumbled madly toward the door; finishing his exit at a run.

The Echo, sternly composed, sat for a moment in thought; then, smiling cynically, turned again to the papers on her desk. Shortly a buzzer sounded and she took up the phone receiver. "Have him come up," she commanded.

She still was reading when there entered the room a personable young man, distinguished by crisply curling brown hair, brushed well back from an intelligent forehead, a slightly aquiline nose, sensitive mouth and chin, and a noticeable hesitancy.

Perhaps it was this last that evoked the Echo's transient expression of amusement, as presently she glanced up at him inquiringly.

"I am Alan Dmitrieff, from the accordion factory. You sent for me, madam?" politely said the caller.

Studying him quizzically, the woman remarked: "For the life of me, I can't understand why you should hang on to a Russian tag like 'Dmitrieff.' Couldn't you change it to some good American name?"

Embarrassment showed in the young person's serious eyes, and he flushed, somewhat angrily, but said nothing.

"Would you care to earn a little extra money, playing the violin here—say, four evenings a week?" the Echo asked abruptly.

She explained her intention of having various solo numbers of merit added—as a frequent, special feature—to the music provided at the inn. The terms she stated offered liberal inducements, and the engagement as soloist was his if he desired it.

Alan remained silent, his manner showing even greater discomfort.

"You need not decide, this moment," briefly said the Echo, again dryly amused. "Think it over, and let me know to-morrow."

The young man agreed to this proposal; thereupon quickly withdrew. While in his perplexity he trudged toward Avenue A, he espied Sophia back on duty at the bookshop, and dropped in to give her the news.

"I would jump at the opportunity, if it weren't for the inn's reputation," said he, doubtfully.

"Nonsense!" Sophia interjected. "'Gossip has a thousand tongues, but little understanding,' I've read somewhere—and it's true. Why, people whisper scandal about the inn, yet they can't name a single thing to its discredit. Suit yourself, Alan—but *I'd* take it. You could leave easily enough, if you didn't like the place.

"My opinion is, she's only a queer, crotchety woman who'd improve a lot on acquaintance."

"She's queer, alright," Alan concurred. "Sort of puts a spell on you that's hard to resist." The girl nodded musingly—with a slight shudder.

Nevertheless, her argument fitted so well into Alan's own inclination, that by the time he had left the bookshop, he already had virtually made up his mind.

In the first place, the extra money would be exceedingly useful in furthering his ambitions. But, above all, the adventure itself was one after his own heart. No one among his acquaintances ever had entered the inn. They only whispered—and childishly guessed—of wild doings in this dread House of the Echo. He intended to *find out* what went on there. With luck—for youth is optimistic—he would solve even the mystery of the Echo herself!

"Let people talk!" he muttered defiantly; "it's none of their business where I go to earn a penny or two. I don't see them spending their money in our shop."

Notwithstanding this spirit of independence manifested, Alan deemed it wise not to name the hotel specifically to Uncle Boris, until he himself had investigated it a little more closely. Although, for that matter, Uncle Boris, was so engrossed by a dog-eared, mouldy old book—when he should have been busy repairing accordions and other musical instruments (this constituting the bulk of the "factory" work)—that it is doubtful if he paid much attention to what his nephew and assistant said.

"Going to be out at night quite a bit?" the old gentleman mumbled. "Certainly, my boy. I trust you to pick the right sort of company."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FANTOM TRAIL.

QUITE likely no artist ever made a more singular professional début than did Alan Dmitrieff at that place of strange and mysterious ways—the House of the Echo.

He heard what he had considered old wives' tales of wild revels held nightly in the dining-hall of the inn. Now he witnessed these "revels"— and found little that could be termed "wild." Over all the gaiety there seemed resting heavily a peculiar restraint. Laughs were checked in the middle. Boisterousness yielded to sudden silences. Recklessly loud talk graduated down to whispers.

There seemed to be a secret guarded here; people on watch. And the effect on Alan's nerves was less soothing than the noisiest, most dissolute rout would have been.

It was not until after his first solo—Wieniawski's "Legende"—and then a Glinka peasant dance, which he gave for encore, that Alan sat back in his chair and attempted to unscramble a mass of confused impressions and arrange them into something of order and meaning.

To begin with, his initial effort with the violin had been most generously applauded—even by Charles (Alan never learned whether this was the given or the family name of the Echo's cashier and "manager.")

During his playing of the Glinka melody, more than a few had danced, in the central space reserved for this purpose. The long, narrow dining-hall itself was guiltless of decoration; possessing bare, kalsomined walls not in the best repair. It was lighted, electrically, by a large chandelier and wall-bracket fixtures; the lamps, covered with faded red paper shades, diffusing a dim, ruddy light.

Everybody seemed to be smoking, and all seemed acquainted. Diners sauntered from one table to another, for a moment's conversation. A fanciful person, thought Alan, as he looked about him, readily might conjure up from this scene a witches' cave with caldron, red flames, drifting smoke, and evil, flitting forms—complete.

Never, to his recollection, had he seen such an oddly "mixed" gathering. Apparently men and women of virtually all races, types, and degree of education were hobnobbing one with another. Here was a man who might have been a circus side-show barker; there, a girl of spirituelle, well-bred type, who might have graced a church choir. The following descriptive facts, however, found general application:

Barring question of individual taste, all were dressed in fine clothes. Every one seemed intelligent. About each—even among those who appeared most in repose—was an air of keen alertness. And, to Alan, it was a *roomful of strangers*.

The orchestra leader, whom Charles had introduced as "Grebs," cheerfully provided the names of those who had claimed Alan's especial interest.

The great, ungainly, fat man who sat, eyes half closed, scarcely moving a muscle, yet seemed the most wide-awake person in the room—was called the Rattler. Chatting languidly with that shy-looking little girl known as Fan, or the Boss Trimmer, was the Artist—an elongated, dreamy-eyed chap who had the appearance of an ascetic.

The bull-necked plug-ugly of a fellow,

they addressed as Spreckles; and Madge was the sprightly little thing—always ready for a dance—who sat at his table. Zelda Carter seemed the name of the dazzling blonde.

"Some only eat and talk here," Grebs observed. "The others put up at the hotel, steady. That is, pretty steady. Every now and then, one of 'em disappears—maybe comes back after a while; maybe doesn't. New ones always arrive to fill the empty places, though.

"Yes; they've got their queer ways," he admitted. "But I'm not one to be curious or ask questions"—glancing meaningly at Alan—"and I get paid well."

Grebs himself—with his gaunt frame, unkempt gray hair, and preoccupied manner—was not an uninteresting figure. A violinist of no mean skill, (the 'cellist and pianist deserved equal praise) he displayed not the slightest jealousy of Alan's preferment over him, and gladly endeavored to furnish the young soloist with the best possible accompaniment. It seemed that the Echo, and a number of the guests, demanded good music; nor would they condone a slovenly performance.

The orchestra leader remarked, smilingly: "You're highly honored by the Echo's presence. It's mighty seldom, I tell you, that she leaves her office of an evening."

Alan had seen the mistress of the House occasionally appear in a doorway—at which times he noted an immediate subsidence in any hilarity or noise. She had seemed wrapped in her own meditations, however, frequently consulting a watch—attached to a jet bead chain—which she drew from the bosom of her dress.

Nevertheless, Alan discovered that *someone* took a most flattering interest in his playing. This was Zelda Carter. No sooner had he concluded his next number, than she unpinned a red rose from her frock and enthusiastically tossed it to him. So, in a spirit of daring, he stepped with a grin from the platform and played an *encore* to her table.

Zelda showed unbounded appreciation and pleasure. She rewarded Alan with a thousand glittering smiles. And the audience contributed a salvo of applause that might pardonably have turned even Alan's level head. Only one spectator and listener seemed displeased. The Echo's sharp look of annoyance had an instantly sobering effect upon Zelda.

Later, Alan played again. As he took his seat, the Echo spoke to Charles, who in turn whispered to the young violinist that his performance—which had been entirely satisfactory—was finished for the evening, and that he need wait no longer.

Accordingly, Alan got his hat from a closet in the adjoining corridor, which also led to the porch.

Instead of going straightway home, he was urged—by an instinctive feeling that he might learn something if he stayed a while—to step, sleuth-wise, to the end of the porch. Presently, as he stood in the deep shadow and close against the brick house, an automobile truck drove up rapidly. It seemed to belong to an express company.

One of the two men who sat on the driver's seat immediately jumped to the pavement. He ran to the cellar-door of the House and rapped sharply. Almost instantly, the door opened from the inside; whereupon several men swarmed to the sidewalk. Together with the fellow who had rapped, they proceeded to unload, from the truck, what appeared to be a number of bales, and carry them into the cellar.

They had vanished with their third load, when Alan—noting that the driver was busy with something at the far side of the truck—determined to learn even more. Dropping over the porch rail, he slipped down the top-most step and peered into the cellar. Seeing nothing, he was tempted to descend farther—finally reaching the bottom.

He found the cellar indifferently illuminated by a single electric bulb. There were sacks and boxes about—apparently hotel stores and provisions—but no sign of bales or men. They must be somewhere, of course; although the one door visible was securely padlocked.

Further investigation had to be postponed. Men were approaching from a direction which Alan could not determine; and the footsteps seemed curiously muffled. No matter what his ears might tell

him, he felt that these men were close upon him. Convinced that he could not escape without being seen (there was the driver outside to reckon with, too), he was cursing himself for a brainless, meddlesome fool, when his glance encountered a stairway rising to the first floor.

A bound or two carried him to these steps, and he was half-way up the flight before the men entered, in some mysterious manner. They passed swiftly through the cellar, so that Alan—grateful for the darkness—was able shortly to resume his climb. He finished it without delay; turned the key which he found in the door; and again found himself in the corridor.

Alan's present desire, however, was to quit the House of the Echo at the earliest possible moment. He seemed in a fair way toward achieving his aim, when the girl of the rose stepped from the dining-room into his path. The moment she saw him, she paused—and Alan had no alternative but to do likewise.

She opened with a full battery of smiles, together with the admiring exclamation:

"That certainly was some playing! You got that moth-eaten old guy that calls himself a violinist skinned a mile—I'll tell the world!" Alan was spared the blush of modesty, only by the unexpected appearance of the Echo.

The stern mistress of the House seemed grimly surprised, as well as exasperated. Her eyes flashed a dangerous warning to Zelda that sent the handsome young lady scurrying away, evidently perturbed, but muttering resentfully to herself: "Do believe the old hell-cat's jealous!" Meanwhile, the Echo looked narrowly at the discomfited young musician.

"I thought you'd gone, some time ago," she said shortly.

Muttering something about having mislaid his hat, Alan bade her a prompt good-night and hurried toward the exit.

The Echo gazed ruminatively after him. Presently, she walked to the cashier's desk in the dining-room.

"Charles, have a man on duty at all times in the lower hall, and see that he reports to you when anybody enters or leaves the House, she instructed—adding: "Let me know personally of any unnecessary loitering."

Alan, having reached the porch, and feeling somewhat chagrined at his bungling, glanced toward the auto truck. What he saw, astonished him immeasurably. The vehicle—if it were the same one—had effectively camouflaged its appearance! From an auto express, it seemed to have been converted into a grocer's delivery automobile. While he looked, the driver whisked a canvas cover over the top, fastening it snugly.

Of a sudden, the fellow sprang to his seat, threw in the clutch; and—with a short blast of the horn—the truck rolled off at all speed. Soon afterward a man leaped up the cellar steps and started to close the cellar-door. Before this could be accomplished, however, a pair of heavy-footed strangers came pelting along; barking the command: "Leave that door open!"

They reached into their pockets as they followed the first individual down into the cellar. Alan still was waiting at the end of the porch, directly above the cellarway, when the two reappeared. He heard one remark in a heated voice to his companion:

"The stuff went in there, alright! 'Twasn't boxes o' groceries, neither."

The other snorted, responding bitterly:

"Sure, Jerry! But did yuh ever know of any stuff that didn't disappear—right into the air, yuh might say—th' minute it reached the Echo?"

In next morning's paper, Alan read with considerable excitement of a daring hold-up and robbery on a New Jersey road. It seemed that the two men driving an auto express had expertly despoiled another truck of its consignment of valuable silks. The supposed auto express had been traced to the East Side of Manhattan.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LISTENING IN.

EVEN while his bow flew and his fingers danced and his violin sang this evening, Alan could not rid his mind of a presentiment of strange adventure about to befall him.

Earlier in the week, he had been informed by Charles—who had eyed him curiously the while—that he was to collect his pay from the Echo herself. Still, neither the fact that to-day was Saturday (pay-day), nor his anticipation of meeting the Echo—which somehow always excited him, could be held altogether responsible for his restiveness.

Perhaps he has been influenced by the grave countenance of many of the guests. There was less than the usual mirth. For instance, the eccentric Russian whom they called the "Count" abstractedly ordered his *chorna kleb* and insipid *kvass*, and failed to come back with his customary jest when Pat, the waiter, impudently translated the "chorna kleb" into: "Dirty black bread it is yez want, sir?"

One by one, these glum-faced diners silently had left the dining-room, by way of the corridor; so that by half-past ten o'clock, when Alan tucked his violin into its case, all those whom he regarded as notables had gone.

Shortly, Alan himself was proceeding along the carpeted hall of the second floor, on his way to the "office." Whispering halls these were—echoing with murmured snatches of conversation, and the softly pattering feet of guests who bobbed unexpectedly out of one room and into another. Some day he would know the meaning of it all, Alan vowed. He would see it out, here, until he possessed something more definite than suspicion.

Stationed outside the "office" was the "Echo's watchdog," burly Bill Rath. He gave a friendly nod to this young musician of whom the mistress of the House took obvious notice. Then he pressed a push-button beside the door—but neglected to call into the speaking-tube above it. Inasmuch as Alan had said the Echo wished to see him, an appointment was to be inferred.

"Go right in; the others are there already," said Bill, when the door swung open of itself.

No sooner had Alan stepped over the threshold into the barely-furnished anteroom, than a door beyond—communicating directly with the "office"—closed automatically; a simple device, this, to insure the Echo the strict privacy she at times found desirable. Yet Alan had caught a glimpse of what manifestly was a party in conference—a party of possibly twenty members. Their backs were turned towards him; and the Echo, who presided, seemed not to have glanced in his direction.

Alan faltered, for an instant. Then he strode courageously across the anteroom and pressed the button of the inner door. Soon the latch clicked and the door swung back.

There was a slight turning of heads, at Alan's entrance; and immediately something like alarm. Documents held by several of the members, slipped hastily into pockets or hand-bags.

But the Echo—after a quick, astonished glance and then a look of marked uneasiness—instantly resumed her imperturbable manner.

"Come in, Dmitrieff," she said casually.

While he approached, with an air of apology for his intrusion, the Echo shrewdly noted the still ruffled temper of her other guests. This seemingly afforded her considerable entertainment. Malicious enjoyment gleamed in her eyes, which now appeared to be laughing at some grim, anticipated jest.

"Your envelope is here," she responded, when Alan had declared his errand. Thereupon—raising her voice and gazing coolly over the assembly—she said:

"I'd like you to join our party, Dmitrieff. We're having a little music and perhaps a bite to eat. Glad you brought your violin."

Alan was hardly more surprised to receive this mandatory invitation than was the room to hear it given.

"Wot's the Echo pulling now?" privately growled a sportly togged individual, who doubtless would have felt more at home at a prize-fight than at a musicale.

There were others resembling the flashy chap, Alan observed; and his distrust grew, in consequence.

"We love music," the Echo dryly pursued. "My friends here are experts—specialists—masters—in their workaday professions, but we all share a hobby—which is, *as I said before, music.*"

Her voice, grown steadily stronger, now

rang with a harsh, metallic note; her gaze shifted menacingly to cover her "friends." They took the hint.

Adapting themselves immediately to an unusual situation, they turned to chat with one another. Soon, gradually spreading out the hitherto regularly-spaced chairs, they sat tête-à-tête—walked about the room—congregated in little knots of talkers. This transformation was so cleverly managed that Alan scarcely could believe his eyes.

The ascetic-appearing "Artist" quietly had taken his seat at the grand piano, which curiously occupied an angle of the walls, and now was improvising very creditably in a manner even suggesting Debussy.

Near him stood a group of men and women who would have dignified any salon. They put a question to Alan—whereupon he found they were discussing the influence of peasant folk-songs upon Russian opera! Nor did the various disputants hesitate to press their arguments, shortly, by expositions at the piano. And the Echo, moving by, paused to contribute to the conversation a number of satiric comments which smacked of a conservatory training!

For the delectation of those who seemed less inspired by the Muses, the headwaiter had appeared with a number of small, collapsible tables which he sat up and covered with delicacies of food and drink. The apartment was spacious, and—except for the Echo's desk and the piano—possessed no large pieces of furniture. Neither picture or drapery adorned the room; all in amazing contrast to the Echo's apartment adjoining, which was said to be most luxuriously furnished.

Alan played, once or twice—upon request; but mostly he gazed in utter bewilderment at this extraordinary scene.

Despite the cleverness of what he believed to be play-acting, he sensed a certain tenseness in the atmosphere. Men and women who sat about the tables and smoked incessantly their cigars, cigarettes, or Russian *paperos*, merely toyed with the food. While even those who performed brilliantly at the piano, or proved themselves able critics, seemed to carry their part unwillingly, and showed the strain.

It was the Echo who—coolly ignoring the gathering and now at work at her desk—undoubtedly was the storm center of this mental turmoil. All were looking secretly at her with an alert expectancy and a hardly concealed dread. One fellow—a slender, dandified Italian—was actually pallid with what seemed terror.

The uncertainty began to work on Alan's nerves also. He was wishing that whatever was to develop might happen soon, when he caught sight of the Echo beckoning.

She smiled inscrutably as she handed him his pay-envelope, then observed: "These night-owls are apt to stay up until broad daylight. Cut the party now, if you like."

Accepting this as a hint for his departure, Alan gladly made his adieus. He passed through the anteroom, and was opening the outer door, when he met Charles on the point of entering.

"Hope you enjoyed your little party," came the manager's salutation. Charles seemed a degree less cheerful than usual, Alan fancied. He walked with him to the inner room, now closed. They chatted while the manager pressed the button and waited for admission.

Alan had been standing a little to one side, so that when the door opened he was invisible to the occupants of the office, who naturally would suppose him gone. As Charles entered the office, the young musician turned as if to go. Instead, he obeyed a sudden impulse and secreted himself behind the door.

Eavesdropping seemed justifiable, while the chinks between hinges offered unlimited opportunity for both listening and looking. Alan's interest in learning what function was to succeed the party, caused him temporarily to overlook the danger of his own position.

As he suspected, the musicale had come abruptly to an end, with his supposed departure. The Echo's guests, apparently grumbling under their breaths at the delay in their deliberations which his intrusion had cost, were retaking their seats in council. Yet, inconsistently, they seemed fearful of what was to come. This was true particularly of the dandified Italian, whose

trepidation had increased and who now was gnawing at his fingers.

Meanwhile the Echo had begun to call the guests one at a time to her desk; although, while quizzing this or that person, and perhaps examining certain paper slips, she often called upon another guest—or maybe Charles—for consultation. Thus most extraordinarily different characters frequently were paired together, such as a modest-mannered, rosy-cheeked girl, and a chap who bore all the earmarks of a bruiser.

The Echo worked with great rapidity, and shortly all business of the sort evidently was disposed of. She had neglected to summon only the Italian. He sat ludicrously squeezed down in his chair, as though endeavoring to escape observation. In the painful silence that had fallen, sidelong but singularly timid glances were cast in his direction.

The Echo's countenance had become stern and terrible. She rose, and standing erect at her desk, addressed the conference briefly—in a voice as devoid of passion as it was of mercy.

"This general meeting has been called for the usual purpose. Not often are the rules of my house broken, but—"

There was a pause in the cold, deliberately enunciated words, while her head turned slowly until her eyes were fixed straight upon the trembling Italian. They suddenly closed, then dilated.

"Moreno, stand up."

The Italian attempted to obey, but slipped back helplessly. Again he tried, and stood swaying, gripping his chair for support.

"Have you anything to say?"

"It won't ever happen again. It won't —I swear—I swear!" came huskily the piteous appeal.

"It will not," stated the dispassionate voice. "When you go from this house to-night, Moreno, you will not return."

The quivering Moreno, shaking hands covering his face, in an effort to hide from eyes more terrible than any evil eye of Italian superstition, collapsed into his chair with an aspirated "Ah!" which sounded like gas escaping through a puncture.

Alan was doing a little shivering on his own account. At this moment he was less concerned about Moreno's sin, and the unrevealed manner of its expiation than about his own personal safety.

Amid a profound quiet the Echo had resumed her chair. Presently, at her desk a buzzer rang like an angry wasp.

Picking up a speaking tube, she said merely: "Yes," made a slight movement with her foot, and Alan found his door moving. For an instant he was startled into a panic. Then came the realization that if this door was closing the outer one must be opening.

He wheeled, and keeping carefully out of the line of vision of those in the office, endeavored to walk both softly and naturally toward the hall door, through which a bearded man now entered. There was sharp interrogation in the bearded man's glance, but he said nothing as the young musician swiftly passed him and stepped out of the anteroom into the hall.

Bill Rath looked up as though he had been struck a blow. Observing who it was, he nodded slightly; but did not take eyes off Alan's back until the young violinist had disappeared down the staircase. Then the Echo's watch-dog kneeled and examined a buzzer attached to the baseboard near the door.

"Why didn't she ring the signal when 'e come out?" he queried, in a tone of brooding suspicion.

## CHAPTER V.

### ZELDA OF THE RED ROSE.

ALAN'S zeal to solve mysteries had been somewhat slack, following his adventure of a few days past. Consequently, having finished this evening's stint, he told himself he was done for the night and ready to go home, without lingering.

Indeed, Alan had the uncomfortable feeling that he was a marked man. He believed he had detected a certain change in the Echo's attitude toward him. To-night, again, he had noticed it. She seemed less indifferent about his existence. Sometimes she looked at him thoughtfully and quite unemotionally; upon other occasions—and

more often—she frowned, with evident irritation. True this anger had not been vented in her speech with him, which, however, still was curt.

He also was more frequently under her eye. Contrary to her former custom, the Echo for some unknown reason now came down from her office, every evening, to inspect the dining-hall, although she remained but a few minutes.

The young musician could not quite analyze his own feelings toward the mistress of the House of the Echo. The fate of Moreno had aroused in him a well-defined horror of her ruthless methods. Yet the Echo herself inspired in him none of the fear with which she seemed to rule others. In a sense the Echo's personality attracted him.

While fearlessness no doubt was highly commendable, Alan nevertheless perceived the wisdom of mixing with it a deal of caution. Moreno was much on his mind.

In fact, as he now picked up his violin and walked toward the corridor, he was so deeply absorbed in wondering what had happened to the Italian that he failed to notice the handsome young blond person awaiting him in the hall.

But Zelda Carter's dazzling radiance was not meant to be hidden under the bushel of man's neglect, as Alan speedily became aware. Zelda seemed arrayed for campaign of conquest; her Junoesque figure glorified by an evening gown of embroidered turquoise satin, its draping caught up with a handsome rhinestone buckle—not forgetting the effective train *en panel*. With her complexion of naturally high coloring artfully blended; gleaming, spungold hair Marcelle-waved back to the shining mass heaped low on the nape of the neck; with a fullblown rose crimson against the white of a queenly bosom, Zelda was truly present and accounted for.

The young musician saluted with the profound respect due a masterpiece produced conjointly by nature and toilette.

"Yeh; a few old rags," said the girl of the red rose, smilingly acknowledging tribute; then, growing suddenly mysterious:

"The Echo's gone back to the office," she whispered. "It's safe to chin. Say, if you ain't got a date on I wish you'd look in on our little party. Only a couple of us; quiet little spread."

Beauty of form and feature often compensate for lack of beauty in conversation, as any wholesomely normal young man knows. Alan would have wished it distinctly understood, however, that whatever his superficial interest in Zelda may have been, it was solely his reawakened desire to gain information about the house and its dwellers that induced him to accept the invitation. Moreover, he was engaged to marry Sophia.

The secretive manner of the hostess was subtly displeasing to Alan. While she cautiously led the way up the stairs, he asked if the Echo objected to Zelda's giving parties.

"Not for some guys, she don't. But I guess you oughta know it's hands off where you're concerned. Watcha doing, kidding me? Ain't you wise that I can't even put my peepers on you at dinner—much as I'd like to give you the glad smile o' welcome?"

"Oh, come now, that's absurd!" he returned banteringly.

"Maybe so; maybe not. Anyhow, I'm not anxious to risk getting what poor Moreno got. He was a wonder, too!"

The young musician pricked up his ears, and inquired with feigned carelessness: "What did Moreno get?"

"Well"—the handsome shoulders shrugged nervously—"they found something floating off Delancey Slip that didn't look like a man, but was—once."

"How did they know it was Moreno?"

Zelda laughed scornfully. "What's the Bertillon system for? The dicks got you nailed, going or coming—alive or dead—whole or in chunks."

Alan fell into an uneasy silence. He knew now what had happened to Moreno. The moral, applied to his own case, was obvious—and exceedingly unpleasant. There lacked even the consolation of having a Bertillon system to identify him.

Stepping more lightly but less buoyant in spirit, Alan followed his fair guide to her room, which was on the third floor. Luckily for his future peace of mind, he

was unaware that Charles, having received from the lookout in the lower hall a report upon Zelda Carter and Alan Dmitrieff, had started on his way to the Echo's office.

Zelda believed in comfort, Alan conceded, when, after being greeted by the two other guests, he glanced about the small but expensively carpeted, curtained, and fitted apartment. Indeed, she had been so intent upon surrounding herself with every appurtenance of luxury that the room bore some likeness to a well-filled storage locker. Quite noticeable, however, was the bowl of perfect American Beauty roses, the supply of which Zelda apparently controlled at the source.

Madge and the count helped make it a party of four, and established precedent by promptly seating themselves at the tiny center-table groaning or at least murmuring under the weight of the collation. The count, however, cleaved to his beloved *chorna kleb,* although substituting bottled beer for his esteemed *kvass.*

Probably divining Alan's amusement, the count vouchsafed the explanation that inasmuch as his work carried him so largely among the great hotels, he always found it a relief to get away from sumptuous fare and eat the plainest of food during his off hours.

Thereupon, the sprightly Madge, nibbling at her cheese-and-olive sandwich, added with cool pertness: "Stick to it, count; never let 'em know you was a born mucker, with a Russian rube's accent and a sour and sickening taste."

The count, a fashion-plate, seemed neither embarrassed nor offended, as he affixed his monocle and stared gravely through it at his traducer, who grimaced back.

"Rum thing, that, about Moreno," presently remarked the count, darting a swift look at Alan. The Russian then guided the conversation into a talk on police methods, disclosing an intimate knowledge of the procedure followed on either side of the Atlantic in detecting criminals. He spoke from the view-point of a law-abiding man, and paused frequently—as though inviting Alan to interpolate a word.

Alan felt that the count was seeking to draw him out, to find out who he was and what he knew. All the Russian seemed to prove was that the musician might shine as a violinist, but sparkled not at all as a conversationalist.

Shortly, Madge flung back her chair, simultaneously declaring she was tired of hearing them talk shop, at which the Russian coughed. She placed a ragtime record on the phonograph, while Alan—himself bent upon acquiring information—addressed a query to Zelda.

"You're nicely situated here. Have you lived here long?" he asked.

"Oh, more'n a day."

"Strange I haven't met you in the neighborhood before this," Alan pursued.

"Yeh; tough luck, I'll say. My job takes me out a good deal. But we got a chance now to get well acquainted, ain't we?"

Alan was almost certain she made a sign to the other girl. At all events, Madge soon gave the excuse that she must return to her own room for a moment. After a while the count also withdrew, upon some pretext or other.

Thus the young musician found himself alone with the girl of the rose. No; not entirely alone.

Some time previous to this, Charles had made his report to the Echo, who received it frowningly.

"Change the girl's hours," she instructed, after consideration. "She's clever, in her way—can adapt herself to a new line without difficulty. Fit her into a night job. If that doesn't work out, I must—but we'll take that up later."

When the manager had retired, the Echo's brow smoothed out. She laughed quietly to herself. It was a disagreeable laugh—tinctured with irony.

"The idol of the good little bookshop girl!" she muttered cynically.

She ruminated for quite a while—sometimes frowning, and occasionally walking the length of the room. Then, with an impatient exclamation, she took from her desk a key. Soon she was noiselessly letting herself into the temporarily unoccupied room next to Zelda's apartment.

The girl of the rose was not getting any-

where in her conversation. Although, for that matter, neither was Alan. He would ask about her work or about the house, and receive at best an equivocal answer. In return, she would inquire coquettishly into his personal habits and opinions—especially as to his preferences regarding the opposite sex. For instance, was he fonder of blondes than of brunettes?

They both probably became discouraged at about the same time.

Zelda, however, determined upon a last desperate effort, now took Alan into her confidence. With careless art she had ensconced herself among the pillows of a davenport, the length of which served admirably to display pulchritude and shapely contour, from glistening blond crown to silk-clad, neatly curved ankle. From this commanding position she murmured archly, eyes downcast:

"I been strong for you ever since I first saw you play. Maybe you remember, you sort o' noticed me, too."

"'Most certainly did," returned Alan, smiling blandly. "You were the most stunning girl in the room, as I told the little lady whom I am to marry."

A red-velvet curtain, concealing the door leading to the next room, trembled, apparently swayed by a breeze, although there was no breeze.

Zelda's smile had passed. For the space of a half-minute she lay absolutely still. Then the blue satin slippers with their gleaming cut-steel buckles slipped off the couch and came firmly to the floor. Zelda sat stiffly upright, and looked Alan boldly in the eye. As she spoke the pulsating notes of her deep-toned voice expressed fully the bitterness they were meant to convey:

"You don't need to stall, kid. I understand. All I gotta say is: *the old hellcat 'll purr around you for just so long.* Then she'll dig her claws into you and it 'll be good night. Risky fooling, kid; risky fooling, no matter how wise you play it. She's got us all bluffed."

Alan laughed—a little mechanically. "I don't understand you at all, Zelda," he said, rising. "But I'm afraid I must leave such agreeable company for this time."

Again the curtain shook slightly.

A little while later the Echo was sitting at her desk. Her face wore a smile of grim satisfaction, and she chuckled softly: "He picks his company, anyway. Knows that girl, once a cellar-rat, isn't in his class." Presently she said over the phone:

"Charles, never mind about Zelda."

Then, as the Echo mused, her eyes frostily twinkled with a whimsical idea.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A TEMPTRESS OR TWO.

THE convent bell, and the yawning and stretching of Tom, the cat, reminded Sophia that it was growing dusk, and she had not the proper light to sew by.

She proceeded better to illuminate the bookshop; then stood watching casual pedestrians, and the men who, singly or in groups, were passing, on their way to the meeting at Slav Hall. All at once she beamed and exclaimed with pleasure:

"Really coming to see me, are you?" she scolded as Alan closed the door.

For response—there being no book-lovers present, and none else likely to see—Alan did what would have been expected of any affianced young man. But the girl of the bookshop was not to be diverted from her mock wrath.

"Mr. Man, do you realize that ever since you took to playing at the inn you've pretended to be too busy to notice me, almost? And this time is the worst of all! Three days since last you called!"

At her mention of the inn a moody shadow crossed the young musician's face. Sophia, whose quick eyes caught it, inquired anxiously:

"Everything is going well with you there?"

"Of course!" was the cheerful reply, which in no wise deceived the girl. "I'm making good money—it's been a big help to me," he assured her. "They tell me my work is satisfactory."

Sophia loyally exclaimed: "Certainly it's satisfactory!" After a silence, she asked hesitatingly, while fingering a button on his coat-sleeve:

"Then you haven't found anything wrong about the House of the Echo?"

"Nobody has been arrested for murder, so far as I know," he evaded, paused, and gave a laugh that to Sophia did not ring altogether true. However, he was due at the inn now, he said, and must hurry along, which he presently did, leaving the girl of the bookshop wondering what strange mood had come over Alan lately.

This same thought was in the young violinist's mind when, later in the evening, he was making for the office to get his pay. He confessed to at least a moral obliquity in staying on here. It was not a place in which a musician could acquire reputation or decently earn money, he now felt. Nor was he an officer of the law whose province it was to pry into suspicious circumstances, although he himself still would like to get to the bottom of them! But what was it that, every time he resolved to quit the job, held him back?

"They call her a witch," he muttered irrelevantly, with a slight smile.

And he repeated it to himself when he came into the Echo's presence. There was something peculiar about her. So cold that she could not possess a mortal heart—so implacable and so self-sufficient—so lacking in ordinary human kindliness: how could he reconcile these forbidding qualities with the undoubted attraction she held for him?

To-night, too, with a filmy black scarf over her modishly dressed, faintly silvered hair, the light from brass desk-lamp softening the stern white features that were fine and striking and so remarkably well-preserved; why, this was not an old woman! The Echo was beautiful—and a woman without age! Alan's heart leaped; he caught his breath in wonder.

The Echo's voice, however, seemed as chill as ever. Yet her manner was more ruminative, her speech more leisurely, and she talked at greater length than she ever had done before.

"How did you happen to choose music as a profession?" she asked, looking at him quizzically.

Alan supposed he had absorbed the love of music while a child. He explained that his mother had died when he was an infant in arms; and his father himself had fed him impartially from the bottle and the violin.

Subsequently, his father had given him more technical instruction, but had died before Alan could receive full benefit of the elder man's experience.

The Echo inquired as to Alan's progress under his present master; then said bluntly that music was well enough as a hobby, but was a thankless profession. Few men, however talented, made a very comfortable living out of it.

"And I hear you are even now contemplating getting married," she added, bestowing a keen glance upon him.

"Not for a while," said the now fidgeting Alan.

"Marriage would be unfair both to yourself and the girl," the Echo continued severely.

"Consider the girl. Art is long, and, unless you are a prodigy, so will be your struggle. You condemn your wife to poverty; you bind her to a drudgery she had hoped, in marrying, to escape. You deny her the pretty things, the luxuries, that are every woman's due. And, don't forget this, you thereby place temptation directly in her path. For, what a woman desires greatly, that will she secure."

Ignoring his horrified protest, she went on:

"Imagine yourself trying to do your best work under such conditions. A millstone round your neck—perhaps suspicion clouding your brain—a sacrificing of talent, ambition, all in the struggle to make ends meet."

"Any fellow who is worth his salt need not stay poor forever," said Alan doggedly. The Echo seemed not to hear him.

"On the other hand, suppose you were given the opportunity and proper leisure to study here and abroad, under the greatest masters. Suppose, for instance, a woman who has no desire to marry you, offered to finance you in this—on no security other than her belief that your talent would in time bring a return on the investment.

"I believe you have exceptional talent,

You should foster it. Would you accept such an offer—were it made with the single stipulation that you give up this girl you call your sweetheart, and devote yourself exclusively to a career? She seems the sort of girl who would probably look at it in a fairly sensible way. She thinks you have genius. Would you embrace such an opportunity to prove it?"

Alan stood dumfounded—shocked by this unheard-of proposal. At last he found his tongue, and responded vehemently:

"I have ambition. But, whether you know it or not, madam, there is something that is called affection. And this something is as strong in me as my ambition, strange as it may seem to you. Sophia knows conditions. She will marry with her eyes open. And she is willing to risk hardship—presumably for this same sort of something termed affection."

The Echo smiled coldly; then, with a slight sneer, said composedly: "Very well, Dmitrieff. I have your answer."

"The young fool!" she muttered, when he had bowed and gone. After a reflective frown she turned to the work on her desk.

Alan, his brain in a whirl, strode down the hall. Was Zelda correct, after all, in her surmise? he asked himself. And yet (this was a curious fact) despite the Echo's attempt at bribing him to throw over Sophia—in spite of his momentary rage against this unscrupulous woman—he could not bring himself to despise her. She must be a witch. He thought, too, of Zelda's warning.

Suddenly, when near the staircase, he distinctly heard Zelda's voice, raised in entreaty, and calling his name. To his distraught mind the sound came from the room opposite him. The girl must be in danger—in need of help.

Without deliberating, Alan hurled himself against the door. It yielded readily, for it was unlocked and hardly latched; and he stumbled into the room. He caught a confused glimpse of a man shaving before a mirror, and another who held something in his hand. That was all, for the moment. A heavy object, wielded by a third bystander, had descended with force on Alan's head.

He revived in time to hear Zelda say fiercely: "It was my fault, I tell you. He's on the level—in solid with the Echo herself. I called to him from the stairs; and he must have thought I was in here."

Shortly the men were making handsome apology. Apparently the only polite thing for Alan to do was to apologize, in turn, for his uncalled-for intrusion. This he did with as good a grace as he could muster.

"Gee, I'm sorry, kid," lamented the girl, accompanying him into the hall. "But you're not going out with that cut on your head! Come up and let me bandage it for you; and sit down awhile," she pleaded.

Sick and dizzy as he was, Alan curtly refused first, or assistance in descending the stairs. Zelda watched him until he had gained the lower floor.

"He might 'a' been killed, butting in like that—*did it for me, too,*" she breathed. "If it wasn't for the hell-cat, he'd—" She finished by glaring, in hate, toward the Echo's office.

Not even the Echo, or Zelda, or thought of the fool he had made of himself, irked the young musician's buzzing brain just now, however. He was thinking how different the man in front of the mirror looked with the remaining half of his mustache shaved off, and was speculating upon the value and history of the sparkling contents of the velvet case held in the other man's hand.

Would the police be interested in this, and should he tell them?

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## CHAPTER VII.

### SWAG.

WHAT Alan did, or did not, do—subsequently to his experience already narrated—may be deduced from the Echo's action the Tuesday afternoon following. After an unusually long and meditative stay on the porch, she strolled to the cashier's desk and announced to the discreet Charles:

"I have decided to put Dmitrieff on full time—either six or seven evenings a week, which ever he prefers. His new schedule can go into effect to-night.

"If I remember rightly, the accordion factory has no phone," she added.

Charles smiled with all his teeth. "No, *madame*. The Uncle Boris would find a telephone too distracting. It would interrupt his perusal of the moldy books. He is what you call old-fashioned."

"Then you'd better send Telowitz with a message—" she nodded toward a swarthy, sharp-faced youth refreshing himself at a near-by table.

Even though he had no work on hand, Telowitz ordinarily would have esteemed it beneath his dignity to act as a common messenger. The command coming from the Echo, however, gave an entirely different aspect to the matter.

Soon he was traveling past the furniture and picture shops and the fancy costumers of Avenue A; presently turning west on a cross street. Beyond the rival Polish and Russian restaurants, but this side of the bird shop, he crossed toward a row of antiquated, low brick tenements, among which stood the Nevski accordion factory.

An idly whistling youngster, who seemed to be tending shop, directed Telowitz to the rear court, where he found Uncle Boris seated on a bench shaded by a twisted locust-tree, and poring over one of the moldy books.

Alan happened to be out, but would return before long, the accordion maker and bibliophile said—and he would be glad to deliver any message.

Telowitz was not greatly enamored of the proposal to leave either oral or written communication with this absent-minded old guy, who, ten chances to one, would forget to deliver it. When the Echo wished anything done, it had to be done.

Observing the messengers' hesitation, Uncle Boris volunteered: "If it's important, you might walk over toward Karl Reitelman's studio and meet him there. The master is giving Alan his violin lesson. Shall I give you the address?"

"No, thanks; I'll hang around here for a while," said Telowitz, who knew exactly where to locate Reitelman's studio, and had instantly decided to visit it without delay. The studio and residence of the master violinist and his socially prominent wife—whose ideas, dress, and diversions were so daringly original—had figured much in the Sunday supplements. Still, such pictorial exhibits had not altogether satisfied Telowitz's professional curiosity. First-hand knowledge was what he sought.

Proceeding by way of Second Avenue, Telowitz came briskly to the tall-fenced little square that, not so very long ago, claimed the exclusiveness of its neighbor (lying diagonally north), which opens only to the aristocrat's private key. But while a great brown church, with chapel nestling under its wing, and a rambling red-brick meeting-house and school standing guard since pre-Civil War times, have endeavored to maintain old traditions, there have come unwelcome changes to the little square.

On its south the brick and brownstone dwellings now carry in their windows many a professional card: often a forerunner to the furnished rooms card that admits a district, socially, to the limbo of the forgotten. On its north the even more pretentious residences have almost been elbowed out by hospitals and a Russian bank. And in the square itself, where once the quality walked, seedy-looking persons now hungrily devour their "want-ad" sections.

Telowitz entered the gate of a stunted, box-bordered yard, fronting a four-story dwelling adorned with black-and-white striped awnings. In response to his ring at the bell, there appeared a household functionary, who, if not the genuine article, was at least a fair imitation of an English butler. The alarmingly protruding eyes he turned upon the visitor were both haughty and hostile.

"Say, dook," said Telowitz, nowise dismayed, "d'yuh know if they's a gazabo named Dmitrieff in there with the boss?"

"I couldn't say," was the coldly disapproving response. "Though it sounds like some o' them Bolsheviki-lookin' furriners the master lets in with fiddles." In afterthought, he granted, reluctantly: "I shouldn't wonder if the person you mention was—" planting his bulk solidly in the doorway as Telowitz made an ingratiating advance.

The visitor gave a deft pull to the other's arm which turned the portly body sidewise,

and slipped through the space thus made. "Hey, there, hey! Where yuh goin'?" the butler wheezed excitedly. He lumbered after the retreating Telowitz and caught him by the coat-tail.

"I gotta see that guy Dmitrieff," snapped the intruder, showing every sign of impatience. "A message from the front! His wife's croaked, 'r sumpin, dook!"

"No yuh don't! Yuh couldn't get in the stoodio when the master's givin' a lesson, not if 'is wife *an'* fam'ly was dyin'." The butler's grip tightened on the coat-tail.

Telowitz twisted to face his captor and snarled: "I *got* to see 'im, yuh boob! I'll *bust* in."

"Just you try it, young feller, an' I'll bust in yer face," the butler promised, as he relaxed his grasp and towered pugnaciously over Telowitz.

The youth seemed to wilt at this threat. He slunk to the hall bench and, sullenly depositing himself upon it, whined: "Well, since yer so fussy about it, I guess I'll have to wait for the poor guy."

"I've a good mind to chuck yuh out on yer head," commented the glowering butler. "You're too fresh, young feller."

Telowitz quailed still more convincingly, whereupon the butler, satisfied that the majesty of authority had been fully upheld, at last decided to let him remain there.

So the butler quite dignifiedly made his own exit from the hall, which the erstwhile frightened and severely disciplined youth celebrated with a smile of triumph. Yet, although the imposing guardian of the house reappeared several times, to cast a suspicious eye upon the youth, Telowitz apparently had not moved from his attitude of despondency.

Finally Telowitz determined to risk the attempt to satisfy his burning curiosity regarding the lay of the Reitelman house interior and its contents. He sped swiftly but noiselessly up the nearest stairs. When he returned, which was shortly—for Telowitz was expert in making hurried inspections—his face wore a broader smile, as though he had met with unexpected good fortune, and he went promptly and softly out the street door.

At first the butler undoubtedly would suppose he had grown tired of waiting. And afterward—if Telowitz was any judge of human nature—the "dook" would be even less disposed to mention the visit to any one, if he could avoid it.

It was unfortunate for Telowitz's plans, however, that Detective Gerson should have been talking with the patrolman by the park fence. Still worse luck, Gerson had seen him coming from the Reitelman residence, where, in the detective's opinion, Telowitz did not qualify as a legitimate visitor. Telowitz saw the detective, too, but seemingly failed to hear him shout.

The youth boarded the moving surface-car in time to elude his unfriendly acquaintance; then, by methods with which he was familiar, and by dint of amazing activity, succeeded in leading the detective a most disheartening chase. Furthermore, Telowitz managed to leave a note for Alan at the accordion factory.

This, Alan received, and, soon after dinner, presented himself at the House of the Echo. As he dropped the violin case by his chair, at the edge of the platform, and somewhat moodily picked at the strings of his instrument, the Echo—had she observed him—might have suspected that young Dmitrieff was not over-appreciative of this opportunity to add to his meager income.

Alan played accurately and well enough, yet—as was true of a former occasion—his mind was not on his work. This night, however, he felt apprehensive of nothing or nobody but himself and his own weakness. Adventure had lost its spice. Yet, closer and closer was he being drawn to this accursed House of the Echo—and he seemed powerless to resist. He saw the Echo—singular woman of dark mystery and compelling magic—even in his dreams. Where would it all end?

He had responded to the encore given his second solo. Grebs already was leading the little orchestra in the next selection when Alan observed a sharp-faced young fellow enter somewhat hastily. He took a seat immediately below Alan, glanced repeatedly toward the entrance, then, seeming to breathe more easily, settled back in his chair and gave his order to Pat.

A moment later the entrance doors flew open. Gerson and a sergeant of detectives sauntered in. Also, Officer Melloy stood stiffly in the doorway, on hand if wanted. Grebs and his orchestra played on, while the diners never lost a bite or a sip.

The sergeant, however, lost some little poise when confronted by the Echo herself. Yet he and Gerson stood their ground.

"This is a place of public entertainment," said the sergeant, craftily, "so I guess we can come in for a sandwich or something, can't we?

"And while we stay, we'd like to talk to one of your guests—a bird we've just traced here."

As the detectives' glances flashed from table to table, the sharp-featured young fellow near Alan leaned toward the platform and his arm described a quick but apparently careless semicircle, preparatory to his changing slightly the position of his chair.

"That looks like our man," whispered Gerson, now pointing toward the sharp-faced one—who, while expressing sullen resentment, accepted the officers' invitation to walk with them to the corridor. There he was promptly "frisked" for weapons and searched carefully.

"He's passed the swag along, of course," the sergeant growled disgustedly.

"Want tuh soich a few o' them likely-lookin' boids in there?" Gerson whispered into the other's ear.

The sergeant grunted dubiously. He was game enough to try *that*—but offending the Echo, *and in her own "house,"* demanded more serious consideration. The Echo's arm was long, and reached into unexpected places. It made him sufficiently uncomfortable to feel her eyes fixed grimly upon him. He decided that they could do no more, just now, without orders from someone "higher up."

Growling a half apology to the Echo, he then cursed heartily the sharp-faced young man and in disappointment withdrew, followed by Gerson—with the young man in tow.

Meantime, the Petrograd Inn seemed to have lost its solo violinist. Alan impulsively had jabbed his violin into its open case, and—apparently unnoticed, save by Charles's quietly amused glance—had walked out.

"I'm done! *She* can't buy me—at any price—to play in that nest of thieves!" he exclaimed, in scarcely suppressed fury, when he had left the hotel behind him. "I'm done!" his quivering voice repeated. He seemed bent upon impressing himself with the fact.

Nor, in making this decision, had Alan seen the "late editions," which described the theft of the famous Irawadi Ruby, from the residence of Madame Reitelman. It made a "good story" replete with the sinister history of the "Irawadi"—popularly known as the "Buddha's Curse"—from the time a ticket-of-leave man originally had stolen it from the temple shrine of Shwe Dagon at Rangoon, when the white, English *thakins* had overrun Tenasserim and Arakan, in Lower Burma; through the subsequent period, during which it left a trail of disaster and violent death among its possessors; up until the recent purchase of the "unlucky" gem by the intrepid wife of the noted violinist.

Madame Reitelman, for reasons that will appear, had not delayed in unreservedly enlisting the aid of a most comprehensive publicity. And the Detective Bureau, not to be outdone, claimed for itself in vociferous print that the "net of the police" was "closing in on the thief" whose identity was "practically known," and who probably would be apprehended to-night or to-morrow.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### GREASED WHEELS OF JUSTICE.

"YES, yes, Anna; so you've told me. The loss of a stone so valuable is to be regretted, of course. But I must have my studio now, if you don't mind," Karl Reitelman broadly hinted.

Unconscious of the storm gathering about his head, the master impatiently waltzed his spare, nervous person about the cheerless studio; dipping into this corner and that—his fingers fluttering through sheaves of music transcripts.

"Alan Dmitrieff is to be here—any min-

ute." Then—muttering half to himself—"There's genius in that boy, although his wits seem wool-gathering lately. Yesterday, I couldn't do anything at all with him. Want to try him again, this morning."

Whereupon, the storm broke. "For all you care, my dear husband, I might as well address my conversation to the blank wall!" came the initial outburst; succeeded by another, of longer duration, and then a torrent of angry reproaches. Madame Reitelman still possessed much of the temperament and the power and flexibility of expression that had been hers while a coloratura soprano of the concert stage.

Perhaps, however, Madame was deserving of sympathy. She was the wife of a genius. Karl deferred to her in everything except that which she most desired. He obstinately insisted upon having his studio at home; and he persisted in clinging to this residence in a socially-dead neighborhood whence all her intimates had gone long since.

As a result of this—and of her diminished fame as an ex-singer and (let us whisper) possibly, a vexingly increasing tendency toward embonpoint—Madame was finding herself on the outer edge of the social whirl. Only by indulging in the bizarre had she been able to maintain prestige among her (the younger) set.

So, the acquisition of "Buddha's Curse" had been the cleverest of all stratagems. As long as she held the ruby, it was bound to keep her in the eye of a world that was continually expectant of something disastrous and gruesome happening to her.

Now, with the Irawadi Ruby gone, Madame's recently-won glory also would speedily depart. Yet scarcely a word of sympathy from this self-absorbed husband, who should have been the sharer of her sorrows, even if he did not care to participate in her joys! Madame Anna spoke her mind accordingly.

Karl met the storm with silence and a frown, and went on with his task. His fortitude wasted away at last, however, and he got to the point of tearing his hair and crying out:

"'Irawadi Ruby!' 'Buddha's Curse!' All I've heard since yesterday afternoon! Last thing at night; first thing this morning! Why under Heaven's blue canopy was a ruby created, formed, or manufactured? I'm heartily sick of 'em!"

This irrational, unpardonably selfish utterance was more than Madame could endure. Even too greatly affected to gasp out more than an "Oh!" she wildly betook herself and her sorrow away.

While Madame Reitelman was going out, the favorite pupil—of whom Reitelman expected so much—came into the studio; and the master brightened immediately. Only those pupils who showed exceptional promise were granted the privilege of his instruction.

"Well, my boy, how are we this morning?" was the master's greeting. "I trust not up in the clouds or down in the depths—whichever it is."

"I'll try to do better to-day, sir," meekly said Allan, who revealed no great elevation of spirit. The master shook his head sadly while the young man proceeded to open his violin case.

Alan happened to turn the open case upside down—when, from the small compartment where he kept strings and rosin, dropped in a wad of lady's handkerchief. And from the folds of this lacy fragment, protruded a gold chain.

"What in the world is this?" exclaimed Alan, picking up the handkerchief. He shook out the chain—in which was set a magnificent gem, whose heart glowed as with molten fire.

Karl Reitelman, looking on in amazement, now muttered perplexedly: "Seems to me I've seen it before."

He stepped suddenly to the door, and exhibiting his customary disregard for convention, shouted at the top of his voice: "Anna! Oh, Anna!"

Some queer inflection in the tone caused Madame Reitelman momentarily to forget her pique and make her appearance in no time.

"Is that what you've been searching for?" asked Karl, pointing to the jewel in Alan's hand.

For an instant, Madame Anna stood frozen with astonishment. Then—"Certainly it is, stupid!" she cried, darting forward

to reclaim her treasure. Irawadi Ruby hugged to her breast, in a transport of joy, she next turned wonderingly to Alan for explanation.

That young man, displaying the guilty flush of shocked innocence, found himself tongue-tied. It was the master who murmured hesitatingly: "The thing got into Alan's case, some way."

Remembrance of all her mental anguish induced by the loss, suddenly burned in Madame Anna's consciousness. She flew into a violent temper.

"Some way?" she mocked. "Very likely! Probably the mysterious way in which jewels always disappear! A clever story—that may fascinate the police." She darted to the door.

"Anna, what are you about?" demanded Reitelman, as he stepped excitedly forward. "There's some mistake—some accident. Why, the boy is as guiltless as I am! You don't suppose he'd deliberately show it here, if he'd *taken* it? Listen to reason."

"It's a matter for the police to reason out," was the acrimonious response with which Madame Anna passed from the room. The husband hurried after her. Presently he returned, crestfallen, and said in a subdued voice:

"I'm afraid you're in for it, my boy. Women are so confoundedly unreasonable!"

After a pause, he asked, with grave gentleness; "How do you imagine the chain got in there?"

"I don't know," slowly responded the agitated young musician. At the same instant there came to him a vision of the sharp-faced young man at the inn, who had been led away by the detectives and a suspicion was born.

Reitelman grew thoughtful, and a shade embarrassed. Alan possessed the master's entire confidence. Yet the boy's strange fits of absent-mindedness, lately—his peculiar lethargy— A very ugly chain of circumstantial evidence—to place the kindest construction upon it all.

"See here, Alan. If you'd prefer to—er-r—retire quietly, until the affair is straightened out, I'll see you're not hindered in leaving this house. Might save you a little unpleasantness, you know."

The young man now braced himself, and quickly replied with spirit: "Certainly not, sir! The only thing to do is to face it, and try to clear myself."

They both started when, a long half hour later, the bell rang. Detective Gerson also presently gave a start of surprise, at seeing Alan.

"Hello!" he ejaculated, with a soft whistle. "Aren't you the young man who plays in the Echo's hotel?"

Alan confusedly admitted the fact.

"In cahoots with Telowitz; eh? *Thought* it looked like an inside job."

Turning on the detective, who was beaming with pride of achievement and acumen, Karl Reitelman snapped: "That talk will keep."

"Sure, Mr. Reitelman; I'm off 's soon 's I put a bracelet on this dangerous young crook;" and he rattled the handcuffs suggestively.

"Remember, Alan," said Karl Reitelman, averting his eyes, "if I can do anything for you, be sure I will. My best hopes, boy!"

Indeed, Alan must have taken *all* Reitelman's hopes with him, for the master appeared even more disconsolate than he was puzzled.

Yet Alan himself seemed hardly cheerful while he was conducted to headquarters, put through a grilling examination, and—despite protest—made well acquainted with the Bertillon system. Incidentally, he was held on a charge of grand larceny.

Barely a half hour after the musician had become the occupant of free but undesirable lodgings, there occurred a mysterious phone call. One "end of the wire" was almost at headquarters itself; the other, at the "office" desk of the mistress of the House of the Echo.

And not more than two hours from this time, several exasperated men were gathered in an office of the Detective Bureau. In front of a gray-haired gentleman—evidently a high official—was a document of legal aspect at which he frowned.

"Nothing to it, I suppose, but let him go," said a voice.

The gray-haired man tapped the document impatiently, as he responded: "What

else can be done? Here's the signed confession of Telowitz, made before one of the Echo's attorneys."

"But it's plain as day that Dmitrieff and Telowitz pulled the job off together," Detective Gerson objected. "Telowitz passed the plunder at the hotel without the violinist gettin' hep. Then Telowitz give us the slip—you've got to hand it to 'im for a smart guy—but he knew we had 'im spotted, so was scared to risk tippin' off 'is pal."

"*We* may know this, but the *law* doesn't recognize it," remarked the high official. "This confession makes Telowitz, alone, guilty. Besides, the Echo worked a statement from the Reitelmans' butler, and probably gave a line of talk to the Reitelmans, for Madame Reitelman now calmly withdraws the charge against Dmitrieff. Says it was all a mistake! And there's nothing the State can hold him on, either."

"You say Telowitz is altogether done for?" someone inquired.

"Sure—croaked," Gerson cut in. "Shot himself—I guess about one minute after the Echo made 'im sign the confession," he added, with a significant glance around the group.

"Well," growled the first speaker, "this makes the force look damn foolish. Newspapers already out, telling of our capture of the crook—record speed and all. Now we have to admit we got the wrong bird. So long as they haven't printed anything about Telowitz, can't we keep his confession under cover a while—and simply give out that Madame Reitelman has withdrawn charges against Dmitrieff? *That* won't hurt *us* any."

There was further conversation. Not long afterward, however, the bewildered Alan was released from his cell; informed gruffly that through the kind heart of Madame Reitelman he had "got off this time—but—" and was sent on his way, without great rejoicing.

Somehow—for his mind was virtually a blank—he arrived at his own street. The news of his confinement, but not of his release, had preceded him; so that he found the neighbors quite surprised, although backward with congratulations. They gazed after him, and talked in gossipy whispers.

Alan shrank from meeting Uncle Boris. The worst that he expected came close to realization. Uncle Boris—who evidently had suffered a severe blow—was preparing to go visit Alan. Grief and sternness were visible in the eyes that now silently regarded his nephew.

"You need not trouble to assure me you are innocent of this crime," he said at last, interrupting Alan's rambling defense. "I know you could not be guilty of a theft, boy—no matter what others may think or say.

"But I do find you guilty of *acting a lie* to me. If you wanted money, why did you not tell me—instead of hiring out secretly to that contemptible woman? This shop is to be yours, some day. I would have sold out at once and given you the money—I would rather have cut off this right hand, than to have had you go to that house!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### ZELDA SHOWS HER TEETH.

ALAN never before had seen the old man so deeply moved. In fact, Uncle Boris seemed to think less of his nephew's arrest and disgrace than of his published connection with the Petrograd Inn; or, perhaps Uncle Boris associated all together, as Alan intuitively had done.

Harrowing as the ordeal with his uncle had been, the young musician dreaded even more acutely the call he must make upon Sophia. He started out determinedly, that evening. As he neared the bookshop, he saw Zelda approaching from the direction of the Inn. The thought of talking with this girl, or anyone from the House, just then, was unbearable. Deliberately ignoring the eagerly smiling countenance, he crossed to the other side of the street.

Zelda certainly was not prepared for this snub. In truth, she scarcely could believe it possible. Had the Echo forbidden him even to notice her? She walked on, mechanically; then, at a safe distance, paused to watch. Alan's objective undoubtedly was the Ukrainian bookshop.

Of course, Zelda—always inquisitive about the young musician—had learned of Sophia. But she had not seriously regarded the bookshop girl as a rival. Once let the Echo give her fair play, and she easily could dispose of that "insignificant little kid"—with whom Alan had become engaged before he had met *her*. Zelda had full confidence in her own irresistible charms.

But to-night she was out of sorts. She had been given extra work. So had all the others—for the Echo was on a "rampage," and was driving everybody to the limit of their various abilities. Nevertheless, Zelda felt that the Echo was especially "taking it out on her"—for obvious reasons; and she was aggrieved.

In her present humor, therefore, she became suddenly and fiercely jealous of the bookshop girl, whom Alan was about to favor with a visit—after spurning *her*. But, next door to the bookshop, Alan had halted. He stood undecided for a moment, then turned to retrace his steps. His courage had faltered; he miserably had compromised on seeing Sophia the following morning, when he would be able to think and talk more lucidly.

"Got cold feet about telling her; has he?" shrewdly conjectured the girl of the rose. "Well, *I* ain't afraid to see her—and I'm going to, p. d. q.!"

But first Zelda walked to Avenue A, and bought a newspaper. With this, unobtrusively folded, she coolly entered the bookshop.

Sophia, who had been moving nervously behind the counter, glanced sharply at the door as it opened; then looked doubtfully at this visitor—hardly a patron of books. She was a stranger to Sophia.

Sauntering toward the bookshop girl, Zelda inquired in a casual tone:

"Beg pardon—haven't seen Alan Dmitrieff, have you? Thought I saw him come in here."

"Alan? Why, he's not—*out;* is he?" Sophia exclaimed, with painful eagerness.

The visitor placed a shapely elbow on the counter, and smiled insolently across at this flustered little clerk.

"You don't suppose anyone who works for the Echo would *stay* jugged; do you? Haven't you seen this?" pointing out a column in her newspaper.

"Charge against music student quashed," Sophia read. "Madame Reitelman—Irawadi Ruby restored—declares arrest a mistake. The famous concert singer, known also for her devotion to charitable work—" but the girl's incredulous, horror-stricken eyes refused to follow this cleverly satirical account of a crime neatly whitewashed.

"He *didn't* do it. This is a cruel insinuation!" she gasped. "There must *actually* have been a mistake."

"Yeh; *some* 'mistake'—when a guy gets caught fair and square with the goods," Zelda laughingly scoffed. "Believe me, he's lucky. The law don't let a man off, with *such* evidence against him—even if the private party concerned does soften up and want to forgive the guy. It's a crime against the State."

"How could Alan have got off, then?"

"Search me, dearie. Alan had about one chance in a million to keep out of the pen. *Someone* must have worked like h—l for him. And the Echo has *some* influence. *I'll* say she has!"

"But why should she do all this for Alan?" panted Sophia.

"Little girl ask me something easy. I don't even know that she *did*. Only, since Alan's been playing at the House, the Echo comes down-stairs, nights, and hangs 'round just to hear him—something she never did before. And all the others gets paid by the cashier; but I hear Alan goes right to her private office to get *his* money.

"Say, it's none of my business—'least, I'm not going to let it worry me. But, you bet your sweet life, Alan hasn't come bragging to me about getting out of the cooler. And I'm looking for him."

"Who—are—you?" almost screamed the bookshop girl.

The visitor leisurely removed her arms from the counter, and, turning to go, responded coolly:

"Me? Oh, I'm from the House of the Echo, and Alan's my particular friend—when the Echo's not around. So long, dearie."

Although Zelda was not aware that she

had left the bookshop girl weeping inconsolably, she was perfectly satisfied with the manner in which she had " disposed " of one rival. After having given Alan such a bad name, she was certain that he would be compelled to break with Sophia now.

Also, with so much of feverish conversation, Zelda had acquired a slight thirst—and the inn being only a half-block away, she decided that she still had time to quench it there.

Her happy, triumphant expression was not reflected, however, in Charles's ordinarily urbane countenance—which the strain of the day's accomplishments had drawn into haggard lines. The Echo had given him the hardest day's work of his life. So there was a dangerous glint in his eyes and his glistening white teeth were bared, not smilingly but savagely, as he stepped to Zelda's table, the moment she had taken her seat.

" Mademoiselle had finished her work already?" he inquired sarcastically. Then—with rapidity and vehemence— " You are *here*—and you know how necessary, how important, it is for you to be on the job! At this, of all times!"

" I'm no horse—I need a little rest," was the surly reply. " Don't see the need of all this rush, anyway."

" Careful, Miss! Careful!" warned Charles, significantly.

Zelda quickly bent a discomfited gaze on the table. The Echo—brows knit and evidently still in the tigerish mood that all day had possessed her—was advancing angrily toward the girl.

" Where have you been?" was the sharp demand.

It was no use telling the Echo a lie. She invariably found out the truth, and soon. Zelda muttered:

" The Ukrainian bookshop."

" Indulging your craving for literature, I presume," came back the ironic retort. The Echo's countenance suddenly darkened—she announced impatiently:

" I shan't bother with you any longer. You have dropped off in your work lately; you have not been adhering to the plans laid out for you. So long as you wish to work independently, you shall.

" You will receive no further instructions from Charles or assistance from me. Vacate your room—and this neighborhood—by the end of the week."

Zelda was banished from the House—gone from the Echo's protection. It was virtually equivalent to saying that her career was finished. There was nothing now to stand between her and the " dicks."

" Canned!" murmured Zelda, dully, to herself. She—the star of her profession; the chief over a dozen outside operators; the ablest instructor of all new outside " talent," in her branch, that the House ever had had!

She went dumbly to her room. There, in a paroxysm of fury, she dashed the vase of red roses to the floor—flung herself upon the couch—ripped and tore at the pillows.

" She breaks me—throws me out of the House and even the neighborhood—just because she's afraid of me grabbing Alan from her!" The girl screamed into a pillow, with tears of rage.

After a long while, Zelda became deadly calm. No tears now—but schemes for vengeance. As a member of the Echo's council, she possessed certain information. It might mean death to use it, but—well, why shouldn't she take the chance? So Zelda lay sleepless throughout the night. She had determined to defy the Echo.

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## CHAPTER X.

### " THE DEVIL'S BROKEN LOOSE!"

THE gray-haired man had been at his desk, at Police Headquarters, virtually all night—and looked it. The gray hair was rumpled and twisted into little quills; crowsfeet were deep-imprinted under bloodshot eyes that glared wildly about. Men hurriedly came; jumped at his sharp, irascible commands; and departed on the run. A typewriter clicked madly. A messenger hustled in with a report;—the gray-haired man glanced at it, and swore savagely. The phone bell jangled; he jerked up the receiver—replacing it with a bang.

" The devil's broken loose!" he groaned, as he slumped back into his chair, with the weariness of exhaustion.

He had been having a nasty time of it. Never had such a carnival of crime swept the city, from below Fulton Street's "dead line" to the Bronx. Hold-ups—bank robberies — thefts — burglaries—pocket-pickings — "con" games — safe crackings — swindles—and without sign of let-up.

Leave of absence had been cancelled—every "copper" and detective in the department was energetically "on the job;" yet scarcely one legitimate arrest had been made. Law and order seemed to have been set at naught.

"Clamp down the City Hall!" one newspaper demanded, with facetious irony; another cried that the old days of the "Pump" and "red lights" had returned; still another, that "Buddha's Curse" was at work. On the street, rumors were afloat that property no longer was safe, and that the police were in league with the crooks. Business houses were employing private watchmen.

But the gray-haired man knew the "Devil" was a she-devil, and that the Echo was merely taking her revenge. His manner of handling the Dmitrieff case evidently had not pleased her.

"Damn that Irawadi Ruby!" he groaned again, as another message arrived and he forced himself on to renewed labor and to raking his subordinates over the coals. Already the press was urging *his* removal.

A clerk entered and whispered into the ear of the gray-haired man—who sat up suddenly. "The merry 'Queen of the Shoplifters'!" he ejaculated. "Are you sure, Tim?"

"Yes; sir. She wants to see you alone."

"By *all* means. Take her into the other office. I'll see her at once"—a promptness so contrary to all precedent, in similar cases, that the clerk stared.

Presently, Miss Zelda Carter was confronting the gray-haired man, now seated at a smaller desk.

"Have I the pleasure of a purely social visit, Zelda, or did the Echo send you to clean out headquarters? Nothing but a watch and a five-spot on *me*," he added humorously.

"The Echo didn't send me anywhere," abruptly said the girl, and her eyes flashed. "The Echo can go straight to h—l, for all I care!"

"Naughty! Naughty!" the official lightly reproved, but his own eyes glistened while he patiently waited. For years, he and his predecessor had waited in vain for this — from some member of the Echo's gang.

"Look here, chief," said the girl, after a moment's silence. "If I was to talk—and say something—would you forget *I* said it?"

The "chief" did not hesitate, a fraction of a second. "Zelda," he responded, "whatever you say to your old friend goes no farther than this desk—at least not so you'd be held for it."

The girl drew closer and talked rapidly in a low tone.

"Great thunder!" breathed the man. "The stuff from last night's Maiden Lane jewelry robbery! Is this straight?"

"Positive; it's to be delivered to her tonight, sure. Late this afternoon, she'll be calling off all jobs—don't want her mind on anything else, I suppose, until this swag's safe."

They talked further; then the man asked: "But can you work it?"

"I think so. I'll try the doped cigarette game on him. If that don't go—well, I think I know where there's a gun with a Maxim silencer."

"Good!" the official commented, after a while. "We'll be there on time. And luck to you, Zelda. You're a brave girl, I must say!" Impulsively he offered her his hand.

"I've got my reasons," the girl snapped. Overlooking the outstretched hand, she quickly rose.

"Don't hurry away, Zelda," protested the gray-haired man. "I'd like to ask a few questions. For example, what sort of people put up at the inn? We've got a line on several of them; what about the others?"

"Wouldn't hurt to get a line on them, too, chief; every d—n one of them."

"What? A whole hotel full!" cried the chief, swept off his mental balance. "Still, I might have known it," he muttered. "Now tell me something about the Echo."

"Tell me what *you* know; maybe I can hand you the rest."

"We know precious little about her," the chief confessed. "Of course, although we never could prove it in court, she was the pet pupil or Echo of old Mother Mandelbaum, who once pretty nearly owned the city, and finally had to skip town. But, unless I miss my guess, the Echo is as big, or bigger than old Mother Mandelbaum ever was!"

"You said it. And only the cream of the professions can get into the Echo's gang. No amachoors there! All stars! And every mother's son and daughter scared stiff of the old hell-cat—yet they stick to her, and glad to."

"Exactly why, Zelda?"

"*First;* because she's got the brains of the devil; passes on every trick pulled off—it's *her* scheme goes through, every time! *Second;* when the swag is handed in to her, it just disappears—no trace—no danger to any professional—and he gets paid prompt, and the highest price. *Third;* she's got the slickest lawyers in the State! If any member of the gang gets in wrong, he's sure of absolute and entire protection. Mighty slim risk of being sent up. *You* know that, chief. And—well—*The Echo is the master mind of the slickest gang of crooks New York has ever seen.*"

"I believe you," murmured the gray-haired man, solemnly. He made no further effort to detain the girl, who evidently was anxious to get away. Nodding good-by to her, he sat pondering on what she had said.

Then he leaped exultantly to his feet, and summoned a clerk. Shortly he had about him a group of his "confidential" men.

"Boys," he said with elation, "this nightmare is due to end to-night." An effective pause—then—

"Zelda Carter has handed over the tip that gives us the goods on the Echo!"

The silence that bound the incredulous men was finally broken. "God help Zelda—*we* can't," a voice murmured piously.

"Oh, we may be able to save her skin," confidently smiled the gray-haired man; adding with some philosophy: "Anyway, the shops are saved the quarter-million dollars' worth of stuff Zelda and her little band have managed to lift every year.

"But I trust to have the Echo to-night where her entire staff of lawyers can't raise a finger to help her. At eight-thirty this evening, Garford and Hummell will deliver to the Echo in her 'office' the swag from the Maiden Lane haul. We've got to catch her red-handed—nab her in the very act—and the Carter girl is going to try to smooth the way for us."

The almost overpowering significance of this revelation began to sink into dazed minds.

"With the Echo gone," some one cried, "the force's troubles 'll be about over! She's been the brains of her whole crook outfit. Now, we'll get every dern one of gang. Not soft picking, exactly—but we'll *get* 'em, sooner or later."

"Go slow on counting chickens," another grunted, pessimistically. It sounded too good to be genuine, according to his way of thinking. Indeed, news of such staggering import left all the company in too serious-minded a condition for any light-hearted halleluiah chorus. They uttered thanksgiving, gravely.

"Now," said the gray-haired man, bellicosely eying the others, "I'm off to get some grub, a bath, a shave, and fresh duds. You boys have got to keep down this racket in town until to-night—when the City of New York is going to be made a whole lot safer for Democracy and even for Republicans.

"Larry, the raid's up to you, I suppose. However, I shouldn't wonder if I butted in, myself. I'd rather take the Echo than nab a Napoleon."

While the gray-haired man—with great increase of energy, despite adverse reports flooding in by wire and messenger—was leaving this pleasing conference, a certain troubled young man was on his way to a conference of two—a conference which he feared might have its disagreeable features.

Notwithstanding his vaunted indifference to neighborhood opinion, Alan was acutely sensible of the significant looks which followed him. The men lounging by the cider saloon, the girls gazing from the windows

of the Russian publishing company, women in tenement doorways—even the tailor's mangy little dog—seemed to be regarding him with contempt, and saying cunningly: "*You* may swear you are innocent, but *we* know you are guilty!"

Nor could Allan altogether blame them. How could he explain the rank injustice of this false position in which he somehow had been placed? It was maddening.

But the final, most cruel thrust came with his sight of Sophia's face. There was no warmth of affection in her smile—in fact, there was no smile at all.

And when Alan tried to blurt out the story he had laboriously composed, it sounded no more convincing than that which he had stammered to Uncle Boris. Suddenly interrupting his tale, he exclaimed harshly:

"Surely, you don't believe me guilty!"

The bookshop girl responded slowly, in a tone of cool reserve: "Bad as things look against you, I can't quite believe you'd stoop so low as to steal—if that's any consolation to you." Then, with a quick flaring passion she hurled at him the accusation:

"*This* is what I never can forgive you: You pretended to care for me, while you were making love to that evil old woman—that *witch*—and perhaps to others!"

Alan stared blankly at her.

"What are you talking about?" he hotly demanded. "Why, I never—"

"You *did!* You can't tell *me*. Didn't the Echo move Heaven and Earth to get you out of jail? What else did she do it for, then? You'd be in there now, but for her. Oh, one of the Echo's crowd—from the inn where you work—told me all about it.

"Alan—you've broken my heart—" and the bookshop girl, unnerved—torn by jealousy, and now crushed under the weight of utter misery—hid her face and cried.

The bewildered "culprit" believed himself on the highroad to madness. He had lost his reputation—his music master—and now his sweetheart, and through a crime of which he was entirely innocent! Instinct, if not reason, cried out that the "House of the Echo" had brought all these woes upon him. Then—by all that was just—it should pay!

He would go to its mistress and demand the truth of the jewel theft; he was positive that what he suspected, she *knew*. He would wipe this stigma from his name. Also, he would learn exactly how he had been freed from jail. And—if it were the last thing he did in this life—he would visit punishment upon the accursed House.

Thereupon—for Alan realized the futility of pleading then with Sophia—he rushed in a wild rage from the bookshop and turned his face toward the Petrograd Inn.

Arriving there, he was halted at the entrance to the corridor. A determined individual said his orders were to see that no one ascended the stairs without the manager's permission.

"Impossible for you to see her just now, Dmitrieff," Charles said firmly to the heated young man. "She is busy—very busy."

Then, with a sly glance at Alan, he suggested: "By the time you have finished playing, this evening, no doubt she will be glad to see you."

Another trick to retain his services as musician to this house of thieves—thought Alan. Very well, to gain his end he could be as foxy as they.

"I'll try it at that time," he said. If this were the only method by which he could secure admittance to the Echo's office, he would employ it. After all, it merely added to the score he meant to settle!

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TRAP.

ZELDA shoved her packed traveling-bags a little farther beneath the couch; examined again the revolver she had taken from the table drawer, and thrust the weapon into her waist.

Her countenance dissatisfied, she moved restlessly about the room. All at once the frown cleared: she picked up an American Beauty rose and placed it against her bosom. While she fumbled with the pin, it pricked her—drew blood. The girl looked at the tiny, oozing drop, and shuddered.

Shortly she glanced at her wrist-watch. For an instant she stood tense and motionless. With a quick movement, she then drew a cigarette from her jeweled case and placed it between her lips. Finally, snatching up another box—from which one cigarette had been removed—Zelda glided from the room.

Soon the girl of the rose was sauntering along the electric-lit hallway of the second floor.

"Got a match, Bill?" she inquired of the "Echo's watchdog," who had almost finished straightening the chairs, removing waste-paper, and generally tidying up the office—as was his custom, between office hours.

Bill obligingly came to the outer door and produced the match.

"Have a smoke, Bill?"

He didn't mind if he did steal a few puffs; and took a cigarette from the box proffered.

Standing in the doorway, the giant began to smoke — inhaling and expelling great clouds. Presently, to his own astonishment, his legs grew decidedly wabbly. Peering ferociously at the girl, he tried to clap a hand to his hip, but the gesture was feeble—and Zelda, springing at him, seized the big paw and held it until Bill Rath dropped.

A few seconds was ample time in which to drag the Echo's watch-dog across the hall and into the bath-room opposite the office.

Without pausing for breath, the girl darted back to the anteroom of the office and proceeded to cut the wires by which the two doors were operated. In her excitement, she severed also the wire leading to the buzzer.

This, however, made no difference. Zelda's plan was simple. She meant to take Bill's place at the door and open it for her friends, Garford and Hummell, as though she had been stationed there for that purpose. Afterward she would use her gun, if necessary, to keep them inside the room until the "cops" arrived.

Of course, if the Echo should attempt to communicate with Bill Rath, before Garford and Hummell came, an investigation would be in order, and—but Zelda took the risk, exactly as she accepted the hazard of being interrupted in her present task.

After cutting the wires, Zelda had to perform one other detail, in order to render the Echo's doubly double-locking system useless and to afford the police the quick and easy access desirable; for the chief was anxious that the Echo should have the "swag" in her hands no longer than was necessary—otherwise, it might again disappear.

So, working frantically, Zelda threw off the latch of the outer door and jammed it with a phonograph needle. She was about to serve the inner door likewise, when she suddenly paused — listened — and dodged into the place behind the open door that Alan once had occupied so unpleasantly. The Echo had entered the office, from her private apartment.

Yet, for a moment, the girl of the rose hardly could believe she was looking upon the Echo. The coolness and poise — the amazing vigor and vitality of the dread mistress of the house—all appeared to have deserted her. She looked haggard, irritable; seemed spent—both mentally and physically. Head bowed, she moved with dragging step toward the desk, sank wearily into her chair, and gazed morbidly about her with a nervous shiver of distaste.

Without warning, the Echo fell forward on the desk and sobbed.

"Gawd!" Zelda exclaimed, almost aloud. "Is Alan turning *her* down, too?"

Unquestionably this seemed easier to believe than that the "master mind" of the Echo's gang—instead of being inordinately pleased with her recent extraordinary triumphs over a city's police—was merely tired out and disgusted with it all!

And it was in this astounding attitude that Alan Dmitrieff found the Echo, when, having slipped up-stairs after depositing his hat in the corridor closet, he had obtained no response from the buzzer, and—wrathfully twisting the door-knob, had been surprised to find the office door open to him.

Zelda had not time even to budge, before the newcomer's impetuous steps carried him half-way across the anteroom. There he seemed to hesitate, and finally to go on, slowly and wonderingly. While Zelda was

confusedly trying to decide on a plan of action, the intruder passed softly into the inner room—and Zelda saw who it was.

Again the girl excitedly invoked the name of Deity, and still again—as she glanced at her wrist-watch. What should she do? How could she warn him? She heard a faint sound of footsteps in the hall. Too late! Impulsively she darted through the anteroom; hissed a warning to Garford and Hummell, who had just arrived at the door. Then she sped down the hall, with some mad, unformulated idea of holding off the "bulls."

"A dick! The Echo's pinched!" whispered Garford, as they saw Alan standing by the desk upon which the Echo's face was hidden. They dodged back and gazed, in dismay, up and down the hall.

"What's the use! They have the place surrounded, sure!" groaned Hummell. "But we've got to get rid of this, quick!" And he dived, with his valise, toward the bath-room door.

In another second he was ejaculating: "Get this, will you!" *This* was the unconscious form of the Echo's watch-dog. Hummell and his pal always worked together with perfect harmony. While the former hoisted Bill Rath to a half-sitting posture against the wall and spread wide the skirts of his coat, Hummell speedily plucked from the valise an innocent surfacing of shirt, socks, and other articles of men's-wear.

This haberdashery removed, the pals desperately scooped out gold and gems and precious stones and proceeded to stuff them behind Bill Rath and his flapping coat.

Meantime, Alan had been gazing at the Echo with an emotion somewhat different from that which had possessed him upon entering. For the life of him, he could not hold anger against this now gently sobbing woman. He had come in sternly to denounce and threaten her — yet here he stood, pityingly! And, yes—besides pity, that other strange fascination still drew him as of old.

The Echo's sobs had ceased. Shortly, as though sensing the nearness of some one, she raised her head. Consternation—fear—came to her face as she looked at Alan.

"What are *you* doing here?" she demanded in a voice that vibrated harshly.

"I'm growing careless!" she irritably muttered—and glanced around. Instantly the Echo snapped stiffly erect.

*It should have been impossible for both doors to remain open at the same time—yet both were ajar.*

She quickly pressed her foot down repeatedly on certain knobs in the carpet beneath her desk; but with no result. Starting from her desk, she rapidly traced the course of the wires; presently yanking loose a carelessly replaced covering-strip, and exposing the cut wires. Her sudden scrutiny of Alan informed her that he was as surprised as she.

Moving swiftly to her desk, the Echo glanced at the clock—then snatched up the phone receiver.

"Charles, where are Garford and Hummell? Quick!"

Came the stammered response: "*Madame, they already have gone up—*" then the sound of a shot and the commotion of loud voices. The Echo listened for a bare instant. Again the look of fear—as she staggered toward Alan and gasped:

"A raid! *You* must not be found here! Go through my apartment—use fire-escape to roof—just a chance the roofs are not watched!"

Alan made no movement. "What will *you* do?" he gravely inquired.

"Never mind about me! Go!" she panted. Then: "It's too late!" the woman murmured brokenly, as the sound of voices in the hall came to them. Her face working oddly, she looked into Alan's eyes.

Instinctively he reached out his arm, and placed it protectingly about her shoulders.

The voices in the hall had grown more insistent. Garford and his pal now made themselves heard distinctly. They had seen, through the open doors, that the young man was at least no "dick!" Hummell smiled reassuringly—pointed to his now entirely innocent valise—and gave the "All's clear" signal.

With a sharp intake of breath, the Echo whirled toward them. "Close the door—pretend to press the buzzer—you've come to rent a room!" was conveyed to them

rapidly by her sibilant whisper. As the door shut, Alan and the Echo caught the muffled tread of many, heavy running feet.

"Play something!" she said hastily, with a nod toward the piano. So that, the following instant, the office of the House of the Echo revealed nothing more compromising than a young musician drawing a soft, delightful *reverie* from the keys, while an elderly woman sat back in her chair and calmly listened.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TRUTH.

NOT a soul in the restaurant of the House of the Echo but understood what it meant when the squad of police, headed by Inspector Crane, appeared at the doorways.

For a moment, every patron seemed stupefied. The only sounds heard in the entire dining-hall were: the firing of the shot that struck Charles's hand from the phone receiver, the shouting of the officers, and the rising and falling strain of melody from Grebs's violin. He alone played on.

The Echo gang was caught at last! So every member said in his heart. The bulls had the Echo—and with her, went all hope.

And then—as full realization of consequences struck home—each member of the notorious gang stood stripped of superficialities—tricks of expression; the habit of acquired mannerisms: and his true identity was revealed. Some showed themselves courageous; others, craven. Some proved stolid or stoically indifferent; still others, madly excited. Wild tears, grim laughs, groans, nervous giggles, oaths, jests—each corresponding to the temperament of its maker—surged and beat like a continuous gale through the room.

None had left his chair. The number of "cops" pouring in had made any attempt to escape obviously useless.

The fellow of circusy appearance (a noted safe-blower by profession) stared with surly resentment at the police; while the "spirituelle" lass (who might have been a choir singer, but who actually was the most finished "come-on" and steerer in the "private" gambling-house game) changed her expression not at all.

Fan, the shy-looking girl—who separated more money from more men, and with greater facility, than any other adventuress in Manhattan—smiled ruefully across at the Artist (an unexcelled forger), who was thoughtfully blowing cigarette smoke-rings toward the ceiling. The Count—(none other played the "titled foreigner" game to such perfection, in all our best hotels)—gloomily scowled and bit his nails.

Suddenly the sprightly Madge keeled over in a faint, to the floor. Rather than leap to her assistance—in the face of the cops' leveled revolvers, the bull-necked Spreckles cowered in his chair. With an angry roar, the mammoth Rattler (otherwise "king of grafters") charged the length of the room, tenderly lifted up the girl in his arms, and glared defiance at the officers.

Thus the cops of the squad were entertained, while a second detachment of the invading force battered its way through the tunnel from Nouffer's Russian and Roumanian baths establishment (which, Zelda had explained, was a clearing-house and temporary storage place for "goods" of the bulkier sort) to the Echo's cellar; and a third squad, with whom traveled the gray-haired man himself, sprinted up the stairs toward the office and the Echo.

The gray-haired man was a sorely-disappointed chief when—having seized the lootless Garford and Hummell—he burst into the office and discovered its proprietress in the placid enjoyment of music.

"'Tis a long time since last we met, *madame*," the gray-haired man observed with ironic politeness; "and again, I suppose, the honors are yours.

"A search is a waste of time, no doubt, but—for the sake of formality—may I have the privilege?"

"You have that power, I believe," briefly responded the Echo.

Imperturbable and wrapped in her own musings, she sat—now a little distance from the desk, while the men almost with a magnifying-glass went through every square inch of the apartment and the office.

"You don't imagine the Carter girl

double-crossed us; do you?" muttered the chief, to a captain who had entered to report his search through the rest of the building.

"Not by the looks of the Echo's watch-dog," dryly returned the captain. "We found Bill just about coming to, but too weak to get up, and swearing in a whisper that he'd cut the heart out of that—girl. I think it more likely that the Echo suspected Zelda and had her watched at the time she sneaked into headquarters."

"The Echo has a good many ways of finding out things," sourly replied the chief, who evidently was trying to feel resigned. Presently, he bowed, half-admiringly, to the abstracted Echo, and even closed the door as he went out.

When he had gone, the Echo—breathing fast—turned to look with a misty, wide-eyed intentness at this young man who in some strange way had come between her and complete, ruinous disaster. And upon her stole the overwhelming, incontestable truth that it was his innocence—his ignorance of evil ways—that alone had saved her. She pondered, wonderingly.

Then, in a voice curiously soft—plaintive, almost—she slowly murmured:

"Can you play Dmitrieff's Nocturne?"

Alan looked dazedly at her. The Nocturne—his father's own composition—one of the first "pieces" *he* as a boy had learned to play. A curious sensation came over him—he tingled with an odd sort of expectation—as his trembling fingers now took the violin from its case.

At the first soft, tremulous note, the Echo sank back in her chair. She seemed worn out—tired almost to the point of collapse.

Finally, the young musician's bow dropped from the strings—and he waited. The woman's features were twitching convulsively. She had risen—bent and old she seemed — and her vacant eyes appeared fixed on the past, as she said in a voice wistful with the infinite pathos of futile, sorrowing regret:

"I always sang you to sleep with that song, Alan. The music was your father's; the words, mine. Just a baby you were then—a long, long time ago."

A great wonder came upon the young man's face—a deep understanding and a thrill to his heart—and he held out his hands as though to encourage and welcome this tired old woman, upon whose countenance was written unutterable misery.

She stumbled blindly toward him, but gently held him off as he sought to touch her. Then, with barely the suggestion of a caress—her fingers traveled reverently down the sides of his garments; and this proud, terrifying woman who had humbled New York's police force, and who had bowed to no man—now groveled at the feet of the young musician.

"My boy—my son! Oh, why did I have to tell you!" she moaned—the shamed, agonized cry of a mother-love that at last had triumphed over all evil.

To this day, the breaking up of the Echo's gang is to the police as much a matter of wonderment as an occasion for sincere self-congratulation. It happened so suddenly — so unexpectedly — apparently without a scintilla of reason; for it patently could not be attributed to the publishing of Telowitz's confession.

One day the gang was in the full swing of its pernicious activities, harrowing the soul of every official, "copper," and detective on the force, and amassing valuable loot; the next, it had ceased to exist.

Simultaneously, great booty (including the Maiden Lane swag) flowed mysteriously back into the hands of its rightful owners; many others received as mysteriously full restitution in money for that of which they had been despoiled.

True, certain members of the band "worked" on, in a desultory sort of way, but independently of organization and seemingly without their old-time intelligence and skill, which formerly had enabled them to defy detection. The police gradually gathered them in, and no powerful influence was exerted to save them. Or, like Zelda Carter, they drifted to far cities.

What completed the mystification of the department was the verified report that the Echo was living quietly and *honestly*, in Boston, with a young couple who were alleged to be her son and daughter-in-law

—and who were identified as the "crook" violinist of the House of the Echo and a young woman once employed at the Ukrainian bookshop.

Sheer curiosity moved the gray-haired man to delve through files of yellowed newspapers until he came to articles written at the time of Mother Mandelbaum's flight. They described the release of the Echo, owing to lack of evidence, and her subsequent separation from the Echo's deluded young husband, Ivan Dmitrieff, who retained their child. Her marriage to the penurious young Russian violinist, Ivan, whom she had met at a musical conservatory—and then her rebellion at poverty, which impelled her secretly to take up the rôle of adventuress—possessed all the elements of romance and tragedy. Incidentally, the cut showing Ivan's photograph bore a decidedly close resemblance to that of the "crook" violinist, Alan Dmitrieff, which was preserved in the "Gallery."

"What wouldn't the newspaper boys give to have all this story, brought up to date!" chuckled the gray-haired man, smacking his lips. But he kept all these things to himself. To offer publicity concerning the Echo was farthest from his mind.

Naturally, the raid had set tongues wagging throughout the Russian quarter. The disappearance of the Echo, Alan, and Sophia—and the obstinate silence of Uncle Boris—for a time gave fresh impetus to gossip. Uncle Boris's behavior in particular was a matter for general comment. The benevolent old fellow—under whose affectionate care Alan had been reared—developed an ingrowing grouch, which lasted quite a while. Eventually, however, it began to abate. Soon thereafter his frequent journeys out of town were remarked, and finally the news spread that he intended to sell his shop and remove to Boston.

So, too, the name of the Echo—more boldly spoken now—has come to lose a little of its dread significance. While the grisly House of the Echo no longer excites terror—for the sufficient reason that it has been torn down to make way for a pair of fine new modern tenements. But the House and its mistress live in reminiscences, and are used as bugaboos which the elders find splendidly serviceable and efficacious in frightening young children.

**(The End.)**

# Blessed Are the Meek

## by Charles Wesley Sanders

DORA WILLIAMSON stood clutching the letter, staring in a kind of fierce breathlessness. It was addressed to her husband in a woman's flowing hand. The envelope was square, of fine texture, and there was a faint odor of perfume about it.

Dora had wanted to open the letter the moment she had taken it from the box, but had hesitated because it required a high

order of courage to do it. And Dora's courage had never been of a high order. She looked meek. She was meek.

Everybody had always called her "sweet." She had fluffy brown hair, brown eyes, a diffident, engaging smile, and dimples.

She had married Henry Williamson a year before. For two months prior to that she had been his stenographer in his real estate office.

Williamson was a big, dark man, full of energy and vitality. Almost from the first Dora had put him on a pedestal and worshiped him. She had never dreamed that he could love a meek little thing like her.

When he had proposed to her she had refused him in an awed voice. She had said she was not the kind of a girl to make the wife he needed. He didn't, she said, want a doll for a wife. But Williamson had wooed her ardently, tempestuously and had swept her off her feet.

She had married him and for eleven months and two weeks they had been supremely happy. Williamson had been everything that a woman could desire in her husband. He had been loving, kind, and considerate. Dora had come to hope that she might be the wife for him after all.

Then a little black cloud had come edging up over the horizon. It had grown and spread till it covered the sky and shut out Dora's domestic sunshine.

Dora couldn't explain it. Try as she might, she couldn't discover that she had done anything, and she hadn't nerve enough to question her husband. She just looked at him, when he was not looking at her, in blank dismay and despair.

Till the beginning of these two weeks they had had rather a gay time, mostly by themselves. They had gone to theaters, to the movies, to an occasional dance. Then Williamson had begun to shut himself in his den as soon as he ate his supper. In there he paced up and down or pawed over papers on his desk. He grew moody and silent. His appetite fell off. He didn't sleep well.

Dora suffered. Her dimples never showed now. Her fine color wavered in her cheeks, on the point of flight. She thought she had lost her husband's love. Her premonition that he would tire of her seemed to have been based on fact.

And here was this letter, written by a woman and sent to his home address instead of to his office. Dora couldn't stand the intimacy which that hinted at, and after a while she steamed open the envelope. A folded sheet of cheap paper lay inside. Dora unfolded it and read as follows:

> Mr. Williamson deer sir, I don't know if you are the man i should ought to of sent this to or not but i am doing it. your name was wrote on the card in the handbag. i found the handbag. it was a woman's handbag in the road. there was some money in it and the card with your name on it wrote by a woman's writing. if same belongs to you please let me know and i will return same to you or if it belongs to some woman i will send it to her. yours truly
>
> GEORGE BIGGS route no 2 Elmsville O

Mrs. Williamson crumpled up the letter and sat down and cried. Although a man's name was signed to the letter, there was the matter of a woman's handbag with her husband's address in it, written in a woman's hand. Why hadn't Williamson left her alone? She had told him she couldn't make him happy. But he had been so persistent. He had sworn a hundred times before she had gave in that she was the only girl in the world for him.

And when he had begun to tire of her why hadn't he been square enough to tell her so? Why had he permitted himself to be drawn to this woman while he had continued to keep up the pretense of his faithfulness to her? It wouldn't have been so bad if he had come right out and said he had enough.

Of course Dora in her flurried state was overlooking a few things. She was overlooking the fact that her husband had had no clandestine meetings with the woman unless those had taken place during the day. For all his sullenness and his moroseness he had spent his nights at home, fussing in his den. He could have absented himself on any one of a dozen pretexts, but he hadn't done so.

All that Dora felt just now was a sense of injustice. Anger followed that—the kind of white anger which comes to a woman like

her. She had always thought she would be ready to give up her husband if anything like this came to pass. Now she wanted to fight for him—fight to keep him and his love.

Who was this woman who dared to carry her husband's name and address with her? Some Amazon doubtless—the kind of woman whom Dora had instinctively known her husband should have chosen instead of herself.

Well, she'd find out for sure!

Her first step must be to get that bag. Elmsville, telephonic inquiry revealed, was a village forty miles from the city on a trolley line. There was a limited car at noon. She could get to Elmsville at two o'clock. Very good.

She stepped from the car at exactly two and a taxi driver informed her that the Biggs home was three miles out in the country. He would take her out there for two dollars and a half and wait twenty minutes for her while she transacted her business with the Biggses.

She was put down in front of a cottage standing back from the dirt road. An aged man was sitting on the front porch when she went up the path. He acknowledged that he was Mr. Biggs. Mrs. Williamson said she had come in response to Mr. Biggs's letter to Mr. Williamson about the handbag.

"Oh, ma," Mr. Biggs called.

Ma Biggs opened the screen door and came out on the porch. She was an overflowing woman with a placid manner, a winning smile, and an abundance of silver hair.

"This is Mrs. Williamson come for that handbag, ma," Biggs said. "You got it, ain't you?"

"Set down, my dear," said Mrs. Biggs. "Well, have you got the taxi waitin'? Now you send it away and pa will take you up to the car. There is no use in you leavin' here for an hour and a half. If you left in ten minutes you could get the local car back to town. If you wait for an hour and a half, you can get the limited. The limited will get you in almost as soon as the local. You might better sit out here in the cool than in a poky car."

She lifted her voice so that it would carry to the driver of the taxi and said authoritatively:

"You run along. The lady don't want you any longer."

Dora had given him his two dollars and a half and he now waved his hand and sped away.

Mrs. Biggs returned to the house and came back with milk and bread and peaches and cake on a tray.

"You must be fagged out," she said. "Riding always makes me hungry. You eat that and I'll get the bag for you."

Mrs. Williamson had eaten nothing since she had had early breakfast with her husband and not much then because of his grouchiness. The food was delicious and she ate all of it. She declined another helping which the generous Mrs. Biggs offered her.

Her mind was on the handbag. She wanted to glimpse the writing on the card. She was almost as eager to see it as if it would lead her directly to the writer. But Mrs. Biggs was not to be hurried. She deposited her bulk in a big rocking-chair and softly rocked forward and back.

"I took it for granted you was from the city," she said.

"From the city, yes," Dora answered mechanically.

She wondered anew just what her husband's clandestine correspondent was like. A big woman doubtless, to match Henry. Yes, she would be a big woman, a handsome woman, not a mere pretty doll.

"We're going to move into the city," Mrs. Biggs was going on. "We've sold the farm here. Well, it was quite a wrench, for the place has been in the hands of Mr. Biggs's folks for 'most a century. But we couldn't stand off when they offered us the price—five hundred dollars an acre and there's nigh a hundred acres. Nearly fifty thousand dollars we got right in a big bank in the city.

"My! Real estate is the thing to make money on. Why, twenty years ago you could of bought the place, if we wanted to sell, for seven thousand dollars.

"Well, it's going to be a great country out here in a few years. There ain't so

very much lake frontage left no more and the city folks has just woke up to the fact that they better grab while the grabbin' is good.

"It's a big city company that has bought it. They've bought all the lake frontage from here to Twinsburg, nearly seven miles, and they've bought a lot of back-layin' farms, too.

"My sakes, what an exodus there will be from here betwixt now and fall. All of us that always had everything but money has now got lots of money. We're all goin' to the city except a few of the younger ones. Land, the place ain't the same with all the children gone. Six I had and all livin' in the city now. You can't keep the youngsters on the farms no more. Pa and me is goin' to live in the city—well, not right in the city, too much bustle there, but on the edge of it, so's we can be near the children.

"We was sayin' just last night that we would build if we could find a place to suit us. We'd build for the children, too. That is, we'd give 'em money for a start and they could get the rest at some bank on a mortgage. A lot of the folks here is plannin' the same way. You see, we're all old famblies hereabouts and we don't take kindly to be bein' split up. Twenty, twenty-five famblies they would be all told, I guess. Make quite a settlement. Well, that would be funny—farmer folks makin' a settlement in the city.

"Well, now, I'm most forgettin' that handbag. I'll get it."

She rose and made her large and easy way into the house. She came back and handed the bag to Mrs. Williamson. It was a smart bag, made of fine genuine leather and ornamented with silver and embroidered with jet.

Mrs. Williamson's worst fears were realized. If the bag was typical of the owner, she was just the sort of person Mrs. Williamson had visualized her as being.

She opened the bag and found the card inside. Her husband's name and his home address together with both phone numbers, were scrawled on a card in a big hand, almost a masculine hand, Dora thought.

There was a swing to the writing which made Dora quiver. No woman except a strong, handsome, magnetic woman would write like that.

She snapped the handbag shut with a sudden jerk. It seemed to relieve her pent-up feelings.

"You can take it back with you," Mrs. Biggs said. "We thought we'd find the owner by writing your husband. He must of giggled at pa's spellin'. I got the school-teacher to address the letter."

"Yes," Dora murmured.

She felt a little dizzy all of a sudden. She put up her hand and brushed it across her eyes.

"You look real tired out," Mrs. Biggs said. "You come in and lay down for a few minutes and I'll call you in time for pa to take you to the car."

As she lay in the darkened sitting-room, Dora was thoroughly miserable and her head began to ache.

She wondered what her husband was doing now. Doubtless he wasn't thinking about her. She guessed he never bothered his head about her any more. When they were first married, he called her up every day. Why, he'd called her every day, now that she thought of it up till two weeks ago.

Two tears trickled out of her eyes and ran down her cheeks. It wasn't fair she felt. She had given Henry warning that she wasn't the girl for him. The result had been as she had prophesied.

Well, she'd go home and have it out with him, leave him, and let the handsome stranger have him.

When Mrs. Biggs called her, she rose, a resolute, hard-faced little woman.

"You look better," Mrs. Biggs said. "I thought a little rest would fix you."

Mr. Biggs drove a new car out of the barn and brought it round in front. As they started for the village, Mrs. Biggs renewed her talk about their prospective removal to the city.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"Oh, we just have a flat," Dora said. "My husband is a real estate man. He builds and sells houses, but we can't afford to live in one of them."

Mrs. Biggs put a hand on Dora's arm.

"Well, my goodness, why can't your husband build a house for us and for my children, and for all these folks out here that want to go to the city?" Mrs. Biggs asked. "He could take the hull business off our hands and we'd have nothing to worry about."

Dora's blood leaped into her face and her eyes grew bright. The sacrificial mood seized her. Here was a chance, ready to her hand, to prove how much she loved her husband. She would throw this business in his way, free him, and leave him to his happy fate. That was the quintessence of submission. The meek submit!

"My husband has just the thing for you," she said. "He has opened an allotment at the edge of the city. It's quite a big allotment. Plenty of room for all of you. I'll send him to see you."

"Do," said ample Mrs. Biggs. "I'll introduce him round amongst the neighbors."

Dora put a hand on Mrs. Biggs's arm and turned her shining eyes on her.

"When he comes, don't say I've been out here," she said. "Just say nothing. Let him think you have never heard of him. It'll be a surprise some time when he finds out I was at the bottom of it."

"Why, of course," Mrs. Biggs said. "What a lot of fun you'll have lettin' on you don't know nothin' about it."

All the way into town, Mrs. Williamson plotted. By the time she arrived, she had her plot well formed.

She went to the butcher shop which her brother ran over on Eighteenth street. She held hurriedly and lengthy converse with her brother and then she went home.

It was six o'clock when she reached the flat. Her husband had not been arriving till seven lately and she had an hour to prepare a tempting supper for him.

He came in at ten minutes past seven. She saw to it that she was in the kitchen.

"Hello," he called listlessly.

"Hello," she answered in a stifled voice.

She had a sudden, flashing understanding in that listlessness. Probably this woman was a new acquaintance. She had lost Henry's address and hadn't communicated with him.

As they finished supper, the telephone bell rang. Henry answered the call. Dora listened intently.

"What!" came explosively from her husband. You're kidding me. Why, it 'd be a life-saver."

There was a moment of silence. Peering into the other room, Dora could see her husband sitting with the receiver to his ear.

"Say," he said at last, "keep this under your hat—absolutely."

When he came back into the dining-room, he feigned indifference.

"Little business call," he said. "It'll take me out in the country. I'll have to start early. I'll go to bed now and set the alarm for five o'clock."

As he turned away from her, Dora glanced at him. She saw that his eyes were glittering. He was hugging up to his breast his prospect of making a big deal, and he was hiding it from her. If she had needed any confirmation of her fears, she had it now. He wouldn't even tell her that he was about to make a lot of money, and she had been responsible for it.

That night he slept while she wept into her pillow. In the morning he leaped up as soon as the alarm clock began to jangle and after a hasty bite he hurried away.

Dora had a miserable day. At noon she thought she could no longer bear the little flat which she had loved when they had moved into it. It suggested her husband too strongly to her.

She decided to go somewhere—to a show or to a movie—and try to forget everything. She dressed carefully as she always did. It was a pretty figure which her long mirror reflected back to her, but it was a sad face. Dora looked at it for a moment and then burst into tears. She sank into a chair and sobbed.

She didn't want to go anywhere. She didn't want to do anything. After her outburst ceased she moved restlessly about the rooms.

Then the telephone rang. For a moment she hoped it was her husband about to communicate good news to her, but she told herself cynically that that couldn't be. She had a notion not to answer the call. She didn't want to talk to any one. But few women have the ability to let a telephone

call go unanswered and Dora was not one of the few. She took down the receiver and said " Hello " in a small, quiet tone.

" Hello," answered a woman's voice, " is this Misteh Williamson's home? Is Misteh Williamson theh?"

" He isn't," Dora replied, and she felt her heart pounding in her breast.

She was as sure as she had ever been sure of anything that the voice belonged to the woman who owned the handbag. She would have just that sort of voice, and she would speak in that affected way.

" When will he be theh?"

" Who's speaking?" Dora asked.

" I've been trying to get him foh several days," the voice went on, its owner ignoring the question. " He isn't at his office to-day. I had his phone number, but I lost it. When he comes in, tell him to call Crest 8762."

" Very well," Dora said and the circuit was clicked shut.

Dora didn't write down the number. She didn't have to. The figures were engraved on her brain in fire.

She determined again to go out. She thought she wouldn't come back. What was the use? She didn't ever want to see her husband again. She felt that she couldn't bear to have him near her.

Again she put on her hat and this time she did not study the face in the mirror. If she had done so, she would have seen that the look of sadness had died out of it. In its place there was only indifference.

She crossed the sitting-room without a glance around it. She reached the door, and then it was thrown open from the hall. Her husband stood on the threshold.

She had never seen him like this before. He was excited. His eyes were ablaze from some inner fire. A chuckle escaped his lips.

" Dora—" he began.

Again the telephone bell rang.

" Bother," exclaimed Henry and hastened over to the instrument.

" When you get through with that call, you're to ring Crest 8762," Dora said. " I thought I'd tell you. I'm going out."

Her husband looked at her with his lips dropped apart. He had never seen his wife in this icy mood.

" Hello," he said into the transmitter. " Just a minute." He covered the phone with the palm of his hand. " Wait a minute, Dora," he said. " There's something I want to tell you."

" Ah," said Dora to herself.

He was going to confess. Well, she might as well have the thing over with. She crossed the room and sat down. Her husband gave her a bewildered look and then turned his attention to the telephone.

" Hello," he said again. " Yes, Mr. Williamson. Oh, yes, Mrs. MacArthur. That was you who called? Yes, my wife gave me your number. Oh, you were going out. Well, I just got in.

" Lost your handbag with my number in it. Uhuh. Oh, yes. Well, I'm sorry but I'm afraid you're just too late. I've sold what you wanted. No, I'm afraid not. Nothing you would want. I'm sorry."

There was silence during which Dora could imagine the affected voice conveying a message to her husband. She was astonished and then she was suspicious. This was doubtless a bluff on her husband's part. He couldn't talk as he wished to talk while she was there. She rose and crossed the room and laid a hand on his shoulder.

" I'll leave if you wish to talk privately?" she said.

Her husband stared up at her. Then he spoke into the phone:

" Well, it's not my fault that you lost my number. I told you the day I talked to you that this property wouldn't be on the market forever. No, madam, I'm sorry. There is absolutely nothing left. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and turned to his wife.

" Dora," he demanded, " what under heaven is the matter?"

" Who was that woman?" Dora asked weakly, for she was beginning to waver.

That woman on the phone? Oh, may the good Lord deliver me from her and all her kind, though a few days ago I was ready to grovel at her feet."

He began to smile, for he seemed to be so happy that even his wife's coldness could not dampen his spirits.

" Sit down, Dora," he said, " and I'll tell you all about it."

Dora sank into a chair. He waggled a long forefinger at her.

"My dear," he began, "do you know that your poor husband was just on the verge of going into bankruptcy?"

"Oh," said Dora.

"Yessir," Henry continued. "Right on the ragged edge, he was. I was facing ruin, my dear. You know when I opened up that allotment out Georgetown way, I put into it about all I had. The one house I built out there put me in debt.

"Well, I had a double purpose in building that house. The first purpose was to make people believe that the whole project was the real thing. The second was to give you a home. Say, that house is a gem of purest ray serene, and, by ginger, we're going to move into it next week. I'm so full of news I don't know where to begin."

He rose and got his pipe and filled it. But he did not light it. It would interrupt his flow of speech. He held it in his hand and gestured with it.

"You know how I've been lately," he went on; "like a bear with a sore head. I dunno just how you stood it to live with me. You've been awfully nice about it."

"Oh, my," said Dora.

"But what could you expect a man to do, how could you expect him to act when he saw himself going to the wall? Why, if this thing didn't sell right away, I not only wouldn't have been able to install you in the new home, but we'd have had to give up this flat. We'd have had to go to light housekeeping in some damned smelly rooming-house. Oh, boy, I was sick all over.

"Well, last week in floated the lady that just called me up. Whee, but she was a crude thing—all froth. I said to myself when she began to ask about the allotment that I'd be eternally cussed if I'd sell her a lot. You see, she wasn't our kind, my dear. I didn't want her for a neighbor for you, when you took possession of our new home. But I had to come to it.

"You see, she's one of the kind whose husband picked up a bunch of change on account of the war. I raised my price on the lots twenty-five per cent but it never stopped her. She said she had a bunch of friends who would buy out 'theh' if she did. She claimed to be a 'leadeh' in her set. Imagine! It sickened me to think of having a gang like that settling around the nest I'd planned for you.

"Well, I gave her a card and she left it lying on the desk. She said just now she got my address and phone numbers out of the directory. Being in a hurry, she took my home address. Then she went on an auto trip. She lost the handbag with the scribbled card in it. She's been hunting through the phone book ever since trying to locate Mr. Wilkinson.

"I just told her there was nothing doing for her ab-so-lute-ly— Why, what's the matter, honey?"

"N-nothing," Dora said. "Go on."

"Take your hat off and come and sit on my lap," he said.

"I— I'm not worthy," wavered Dora.

He threw back his head and laughed.

"I see," he chuckled; "just because I'm getting on my feet, you're bringing that old scarecrow to life, eh? Worthy, my foot. Come over here."

Through a mist of tears she groped her way to him. He caught her and drew her down to him and held her firmly.

"Now, for the big news," he said. "Your brother phoned me last night that he had got track of just the kind of people who would grab at my allotment. I told him to keep it under his hat. Wanted to surprise you. This morning I hiked out to a burg out here on the trolley. Say, I met some *folks* out there, believe me. Our sort of folks, Dora.

"Why, say, Mrs. Biggs, the first one I went to see, wouldn't talk business till I had my dinner and I was out there a little after nine. She made Mr. Biggs take me for a ride in their new car. That old gander can drive, too. Well, we got back a little after eleven. And, say, Mrs. Biggs set out a dinner like I used to eat when my own mother was alive down on the farm. Chicken and fixin's and apple pie.

"Dora, I told Mrs. Biggs that if she would teach you to make pie like that I'd shave the price of her lot ten per cent. She laughed and said I didn't need to. She

said she'd teach you anything she knew about cookin' or bakin'. She said she could just imagine the kind of a girl you were. And I'll be hanged if she didn't describe you, although she didn't do you justice. It was good, though, considering she had never seen you."

Dora shivered in her husband's arms. Her conscience wasn't pricking her. It was stabbing her.

"Well, I sold seven lots to-day," Henry rattled on. "And I've got the addresses of a lot of young folks here in town that'll buy to be near the old folks. Say, those people are a bunch of real Americans. They're strong on the family stuff. We'll have a reg'lar colony of real people out there. And I want to say right now that there won't be a nicer home in the allotment than yours— Why, what *is* the matter, Dora."

Dora was sobbing in good earnest now. She freed herself from his arms and got to her feet.

"I— I always told you I wasn't the girl to make a proper wife for you," she whispered. "Now, I'm sure of it. Listen to the horrible thing I have to confess."

She told her story. Henry sat staring at her. She finished and met his gaze. She expected an outburst of anger.

But Henry suddenly threw back his head and exploded in laughter. Then he sprang up and caught his little wife in his big arms.

"Oh, girl," he said huskily because he had laughed so much, "this is the crownin' touch. I know you love me now. Why, you were jealous! Think of it! You were jealous on account of a big old slob like me."

Late that night after a fitting celebration which had included a look at their future home, Dora thought of the handbag.

She brought it out from the dresser drawer where she had hidden it.

"What'll we do with this, Henry?" she asked. "I—I can't confess to that woman that I went out there and got it."

"Why, just wrap it up and send it to her by parcel post," Henry said. "She'll never know who it came from."

"Oh, you're so kind and good," Dora sighed. "You think of everything for me."

"That's because I love you," said Henry. "Don't you love me a little?"

"A little?" repeated Dora tremulously. "Not a *little,* Henry dear."

She kissed him. Then she turned back to the handbag. She opened it and took out the card with her husband's name and telephone numbers on it. She tore the card into fine fragments and dropped them into the waste basket.

"What was that?" Henry asked.

"The card that woman had with your name and phone numbers on it," Dora answered. "No use leaving it in there. If she wants to talk to you about—about the lots she can find your name in the directory."

"Oh, her," said Henry scornfully. "She's probably got me pegged as Wilkinson again by now."

"I hope so," murmured Dora under her breath. "The hateful thing!"

## A SONG IN DOUBT

IS it lover or friend that she holds me?
I know not, but know
That she shapes me and molds me
As sculptor the pliable clay;
My longing, it floods and enfolds me
As does earth the snow,
Or as, at the lapse of the thrush song, the darkness the day.

Her eyes are as skies at their fairest,
Unfathomably blue;
Her lips are as rarest
Anemones touched by the sun;
Ah, heart of my heart, if thou carest,
Then give me the clue
That shall point out the radiant pathway to paradise won!

*Sennett Stephens.*

# A Man to His Mate

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Isle of Drums," "The Butterfly Orchid," etc.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### PEGGY SIMMS.

"CAUGHT with the goods!" said Lund. "Two tries at mutiny in one day, my lads. You want to git it into your boneheads that I'm runnin' this ship from now on. I can sail it without ye and, by God, I'll set the bunch of ye ashore same's you figgered on doin' with me if you don't sit up an' take notice! The rifles an' guns"—he glanced at the orderly display of weapons in racks on the wall—"are too vallyble to chuck over, but here go the shells, ev'ry last one of them. So that nips *that* little plan, Deming."

He turned back the slip to display the contents.

"Open a port, Rainey, an' heave the lot out."

Rainey did so while the hunters gazed on in silent chagrin.

"There's one thing more," said Lund, grinning at them. "If enny of you saw a man hurtin' a dog, you'd probably fetch him a wallop. But you don't think ennything of scarin' the life out of a half-baked kid an' markin' up his hide like a patchwork quilt. Thet kid's stayin' aft after this. One of you monkey with him, an' you'll do jest what he's bin doin', wish you was dead an overboard."

He turned on his heel and walked to the door, Rainey following.

"Burial of the skipper at dawn," said Lund. "All hands on deck, clean an' neatly dressed to stand by. An' see yore behavior fits the occasion. Deming, you'll turn out, too. No malingerin'."

It was plain that the news of the captain's death was known to them. They showed no surprise. Rainey was sure that Tamada had not mentioned it. It had leaked out through the grape-vine telegraphy of all ships. Doubtless, he thought, the after-cabin and its doings were always being spied upon.

"Will you take the service ter-morrer?" Lund asked Rainy when they were back in the cabin. "Bein' as yore an eddicated chap?"

"Why—I don't know it. Is there a prayer-book aboard? I thought the skipper always presided."

"I'm only deputy-skipper w'en it comes down to that," said Lund. "It ain't my ship. I'm jest runnin' it under contract with my late partner. The ship belongs to the gal. As to a prayer-book, there ain't sech an article aboard to my knowledge. But I'd like to have it go off shipshape. For Simms's sake as well as the gal's. I reckon he used his best jedgment 'bout puttin' back after me on the floe. I might have done the same thing myself."

Rainey doubted that statement, and set it down to Lund's generosity. Many of his late words and actions had displayed a latent depth of feeling that he had never credited Lund with possessing. He could not help believing that, in some way, the girl had brought them to the surface.

**This story began in The Argosy for February 7.**

"I thought I saw a Bible in the safe," he said, when we were looking for the shells. There may be a prayer-book. I suppose there have been occasions for it. The mate died at sea last trip."

"There may be," returned Lund. "That's where Simms ud keep it. He wasn't what you'd call a religious man. We'll take a look afore we turn in."

There were offices to be performed for the dead captain that the girl, with all her willingness, could not attempt. Lund did not mention them, and Rainey vacillated about disturbing her until he saw Tamada go through the cabin with folded canvas and a flag. The Japanese tapped on the door, which was instantly opened to him.

There was no doubt that Tamada, with his medical experience, was best fitted for the task, but it seemed to Rainey also that the girl had deliberately ignored their services and that, despite her involuntary admiration of Lund's fight against odds, or in revulsion of it, she reckoned them hostile to her sentiments. Lund roused him by talking of the burial-service for Simms.

"You're a writer," he said. "What's the good of knowin' how to handle words if you can't fake up some sort of a service? One's as good as another, long as it sounds like the real thing."

"I reckon there's a God," he went on. "Somethin' that started things, somethin' that keeps the stars from runnin' each other down, but, after He wound up the clock He made, I don't figger He bothers much about the works.

"Luck's the big thing that counts. We're all in on the deal. Some of us get the deuces an' treys, an' some git the aces. If you're born lucky things go soft for you. But, if it wasn't for luck, for the chance an' the hope of it, things ud be upside down an' plain anarchy in a jiffy. If it wasn't the pore devil's idea that his luck has got to change for the better, mebbe termorrer, he'd start out an' cut his own throat, or some one else's, if he had ginger enough."

"It's hardly all luck, is it?" asked Rainey. "Look at you! You're bigger than most men, stronger, better equipped to get what you want."

"Hell!" laughed Lund. "I was lucky to be born that way. But you've got to fudge up some sort of a service to suit the gal. You've got that Bible. It ought to be easy. Simms wouldn't give a whoop, enny more 'n I would. When you're dead you're through, so far's enny one can prove it to you. A dead body's a nuisance, an' the sooner it's got rid of the better. But if it's goin' to make the livin' feel enny better for spielin' off some fine words, why, hop to it an' make up yore speech."

Peggy Simms saved Rainey by producing a prayer-book, bringing it to Lund, her face pale but composed enough, and her shadowed eyes calm as she gave it to him.

"I reckon Rainey here ud read it better 'n me," he said. "He's a scholar."

"If you will," asked the girl. She seemed to have outworn her first sorrow, to have obtained a grip of herself that, with the dignity of her bereavement, the very control of her undoubted grief, set up a barrier between her and Lund. Rainey was conscious of this fence behind which the girl had retreated. She was polite, but she did not ask this service as a favor, as a friendly act. Refusal, even, would not have visibly affected her, he fancied. There was an invisible armor about her that might be added to at any moment by a shield of silent scorn. Somehow, if sex had, for a swift moment, brought her and Lund into any contact, that same sex, showing another aspect, set them far apart.

Lund showed that he felt it, running his splay fingers through his beard in evident embarrassment, while Rainey took the book silently, looking through the pages for the ritual of "Burial at Sea."

Arrangements had been made on deck long before dawn. A section of the rail had been removed and a grating arranged that could be tipped at the right moment for the consignment of the captain's body to the deep.

The sea was running in long heaves, and the sun rose in a clear sky. The ocean was free from ice, though the wind was cold. Here and there a berg, far off, caught the sparkle of the sun and, to the north, parallel to their course, the peaks of the Aleutian Isles, broken buttresses of an an-

cient seabridge, showed sharply against the horizon.

At four bells in the morning-watch all hands had assembled, save for Tamada and Hansen, who appeared bearing the canvas-enveloped, flag-draped body of Simms, his sea-shroud weighted by heavy pieces of iron. Peggy Simms followed them, and, as the crew, with shuffling feet and throats that were repeatedly cleared, gathered in a semi-circle, she arranged the folds of the Stars and Stripes that Hansen attached to a light line by one corner.

Whatever Lund affected, the solemnity of the occasion held the men. They uncovered and stood with bowed heads that hid the bruised faces of the hunters. Lund's own damaged features were lowered as Rainey commenced to read. Only Deming's face, gray from the effort of coming on deck and the pain in his arm, held the semblance of a sneer that was largely *bravado*. A hunter had his arm tucked in that of his comrade with the broken ribs. A seaman was tolled off to the wheel and the schooner was held to the wind with all sheets close inboard, rising and falling on an almost level keel.

"*And the body shall be cast into the sea.*"

At the words Lund and Hansen tilted the grating. There was a slight pause as if the body were reluctant to start on its last journey, and then it slid from the platform and plunged into the sea, disappearing instantly under the urge of the weights, with a hissing aeration of the water. The flag, held inboard by the line, fluttered a moment and subsided over the grating. The girl turned toward them, her head up.

"Thank you," she said, and went below.

"That's over," said Lund, letting out whatever emotions he might have repressed in a long breath. "Now, then, trim ship! Watch-off, get below. We're goin' to drive her for all she's worth."

He took over the wheel himself as the men jumped to the sheets and soon Lund was getting every foot of possible speed out of the schooner. He was as good a sailor as Simms, inclined to take more chances, but capable of handling them.

The girl kept below and seldom came out of her cabin, Tamada serving her meals in there. Rainey could see Lund's resentment growing at this attitude that seemed to him normal enough, though it might present difficulty later if persisted in. But the morning that they headed up through Sequam Pass between the spouting reefs of Sequam and Amlia Islands, she came on deck and went forward to the bows, taking in deep breaths of the bracing air and gazing north to the free expanse of Bering Strait. Rainey left her alone, but Lund welcomed her as she came back aft.

"Glad to see you on deck again, Miss Peggy," he said. "You need sun and air to git you in shape again."

His glance held vivid admiration of her as he spoke, a glance that ran over her rounded figure with a frank approval that Rainey resented, but the girl paid no attention to. She seemed to have made up her mind to a change of attitude.

"How far have we yet to go?" she asked.

"A'most a thousan' miles to the Strait proper," said Lund. "The Nome-Unalaska steamer lane lies to the east. Runs close to the Pribilofs, three hundred miles north, with Hall an' St. Matthew three hundred further. Then comes St. Lawrence Isle, plumb in the middle of the Strait, with Siberia an' Alaska closin' in."

He was keen to hold her in conversation, and she willing to listen, assenting almost eagerly when he offered to point out their positions on the chart, spread on the cabin table. Lund talked well, for all his limited and at times luridly inclined vocabulary, whenever he talked of the sea and of his own adventurings, stating them without brag, but bringing up striking pictures of action, full of the color and savor of life in the raw. From that time on Peggy Simms came to the table and talked freely with Lund, more conservatively with Rainey.

The newspaperman was no experienced analyst of woman nature, but he saw, or thought he saw, the girl watching Lund closely when he talked, studying him, sometimes with more than a hint of approbation, at others with a look that was puzzled, seeming to be working at a problem. The

giant's liking for her, boyish at times, or swiftly changing to bolder appraisal, grew daily.

The girl, Rainey decided, was humoring Lund, seeking to know how with her feminine methods she might control him, keep him within bounds. Her coldness, it seemed, she had cast aside as an expedient that might prove too provoking and worthless.

And Rainey's valuation of her resources increased. She was handling her woman's weapons admirably, yet when he sometimes, at night, under the cabin lamp, saw the smoldering light glowing in Lund's agate eyes, he knew that she was playing a dangerous game.

"What d'ye figger on doin' with yore share, Rainey?" Lund asked him the night that they passed Nome. It was stormy weather in the Strait, and the Karluk was snugged down under treble reefs, fighting her way north. Ice in the Narrows was scarce, though Lund predicted broken floes once they got through. The cabin was cozy, with a stove going. Peggy Simms was busied with some sewing, the canary and the plants gave the place a domestic atmosphere, and Lund, smoking comfortably, was eminently at ease.

"'Cordin' to the way the men figgered it out," he went on, "though I reckon they're under the mark more 'n over it, you'll have forty thousan' dollars. That's quite a windfall, though nothin' to Miss Peggy, here, or me, for that matter. I s'pose you got it all spent already."

"I don't know that I have," said Rainey. "But I think, if all goes well, I'll get a place up in the Coast Range, in the redwoods looking over the sea, and write. Not newspaper stuff, but what I've always wanted to. Stories. Yarns of adventure!"

Peggy Simms looked up.

"You've never done that?" she asked.

"Not satisfactorily. I suppose that genius burns in a garret, but I don't imagine myself a genius and I don't like garrets. I've an idea I can write better when I don't have to stand the bread-and-butter strain of routine."

"Goin' to write second-hand stuff?" Lund. "Why don't you *live* what you write? I don't see how you're goin' to git under a man's skin by squattin' in a bungalow with a Jap servant, a porcelain bathtub, an' breakfast in bed. Why don't you travel an' see stuff as it is? How in blazes are you goin' to write Adventure if you don't live it?"

"Me, I'm goin' to git a schooner built accordin' to my own ideas. Have a kicker engine in it, mebbe, an' go round the world. What's the use of livin' on it an' not knowin' it by sight? Books and pictures are all right in their way, I reckon, but, while my riggin' holds up, I'm for travel. Mebbe I'll take a group of islands down in the South Seas after a bit an' make somethin' out of 'em. Not jest *copra* an' pearl-shell, but cotton an' rubber."

"A king and his kingdom," suggested the girl.

"Aye, an' mebbe a queen to go with it," replied Lund, his eyes wide open in a look that made the girl flush and Rainey feel the hidden issue that he felt was bound to come, rising to the surface.

"That's a *man's* life," went on Lund. "Travel's all right, but a man's got to do somethin', buck somethin', start somethin'. An' a red-blooded man wants the right kind of a woman to play mate. Polish off his rough edges, mebbe. I'd rather be a rough castin' that could stand filin' a bit, than smooth an' plated. An', when I find the right woman, one of my own breed, I'm goin' to tie to her an' her to me.

"I'm goin' to be rich. They've cleaned up the sands of Nome, but there's others 'll be found yit between Cape Hope an' Cape Barry. Meantime, we've got a placer of our own. With plenty of gold they ain't much limit to what a man can do. I've roughed it all my life, an' I'm not lookin' for ease. It makes a man soft. But—"

He swept the figure of the girl in a pause that was eloquent of his line of thought. She grew uneasy of it, but Lund maintained it until she raised her eyes from her work and challenged his. Rainey saw her breast heave, saw her struggle to hold the gaze, turn red, then pale. He thought her eyes showed fear, and then she stiffened. Almost unconsciously she raised her hand to where Rainey was sure she kept the little

pistol, touched something as though to assure herself of its presence, and went on sewing. Lund chuckled, but shifted his eyes to Rainey.

"Why don't you write up *this* v'yage? When it's all over? There's adventure for you, an' we ain't ha'f through with it. An' romance, too, mebbe. We ain't developed much of a love-story as yit, but you never can tell."

He laughed, and Peggy Simms got up quietly, folded her sewing, and said "Good night" composedly before she went to her room.

"How about it, Rainey?" quizzed Lund. "How about the love part of it? She's a beauty, an' she'll be an heiress. Ain't you got enny red blood in yore veins? Don't you want her? You won't find many to hold a candle to her. Looks—built like a racin' yacht, smooth an' speedy. Smart, an' rich into the bargain. Why don't you make love to her?"

Rainey felt the burning blood mounting to his face and brain.

"I am not in love with Miss Simms," he said. "If I was I should not try to make love to her under the circumstances. She's alone, and she's fatherless. I do not care to discuss her."

"She's a woman," said Lund. "And you're a damned prig! You'd like to bust me in the jaw, but you know I'm stronger. You've got some guts, Rainey, but you're hidebound. You ain't got ha'f the git-up-an'-go to ye that she has. She's a woman, I tell you, an' she's to be won. If you want her, why don't you stand up an' try to git her 'stead of sittin' around like a sick cat whenever I happen to admire her looks.

"I've seen you. I ain't blind enny longer, you know. She's a woman an' I'm a man. I thought you was one. But you ain't. Yore idea of makin' love is to send the gal a box of candy an' walk pussy-footed an' write poems to her. You want to *write* life an' I want to *live* it. So does a gal like that. She's more my breed than yore's, if she has got eddication. An' she's flesh and blood. Same as I am. You're half sawdust. You're stuffed."

He went on deck laughing, leaving Rainey raging but impotent. Lund appeared to think the situation obvious. Two men, and a woman, who was attractive in many ways. The *only* woman while they were aboard the schooner, therefore the more to be desired, admired by men cut off from the rest of the world.

He expected Rainey to be in love with her, to stand up and say so, to endeavor to win her. Lund sought the ardor of competition. He might be looking for the excuse to crush Rainey.

But he had said she was of his breed, and that was a true saying. If Lund was a son of the sea, she was a daughter of a line of seamen. Lund, sooner or later, meant to take her, willing or unwilling. He had said so, none too covertly, that very evening. And, if Rainey meant to stand between her and Lund as a protector, Lund would accept him in that character only as the girl's lover and his rival.

And Rainey did not know whether he was in love with her or not. He could not even be certain of the girl. There were times when Lund seemed to fascinate her. One thing he braced himself to do, to be ready to aid her against Lund if occasion came, and she needed protection. The Luck, as Lund phrased it, that had given brawn to the giant, had given Rainey brains. When the time came he would use them.

After this the girl avoided Lund's company as much as possible by seeking Rainey's. They worked through the Strait and headed into the Arctic Ocean. Ice was all about them, fields formed of vast blocks of frozen water divided by broad lanes through which the Karluk slowly made her way, a maze of ice, always threatening, calling for all of Lund's skill while he fumed at every barrier, every change of the weather that grew steadily colder.

The sky was never entirely unveiled by mist, and at night, as they sailed down a frozen fiord with lookouts doubled, the grinding, smashing noises of the ice seemed the warning voice of the North, as they sailed on into the wilderness.

The hunters kept below. Lund bossed the ship. Deming, it seemed, managed to hold his cards and deal them despite his mending arm in splints. And he was stead-

ily winning. The girl talked to Rainey of her own life ashore and at sea on earlier trips with her father, of his own desire to write, of his ambitions, until there was little he had not told her, even to the girl who was the daughter of the Lumber King.

And the spell of her nearness, her youth, her beauty, naturally held him. When he was on deck duty she remained in her room. When Lund relieved him, the day's work giving Lund, Hansen, and Rainey each two regular watches of four hours, though Lund put in most of the night as the ice grew more difficult to navigate, Rainey occasionally saw the giant's eyes sizing him up with a sardonic twinkle.

For the time being, the safety of the Karluk and the successful carrying out of the purpose of the trip took all of Lund's attention and energy. Twice he had been thwarted by the weather from gleaning his golden harvest, and it began to look as if the third attempt might be no more fortunate.

"The Karluk's stout," he said once, "but she ain't built for the Arctic. If we git nipped badly she'll go like an eggshell."

"And then what?" Rainey asked.

"Git the gold! That's what we come for. If we have to make sleds an' use the hunters for a dorg-team." He laughed indomitably. "We'll make a man of you yit, Rainey, afore we git back."

Lund was snatching sleep in scraps, seeking always to feel a way toward the position of the island through the ice that continually baffled progress. Several times they risked the schooner in a narrow lane when a lull of the often uncertain wind would have seen them ground between the edges of the floe. Twice Lund ordered out the boats to save them. Once all hands fended desperately with spars to keep her clear, and only the schooner's overhung stern saved her rudder from the savagely clashing masses that closed behind them.

But he showed few signs of strain. Once in a while he would sit with closed eyes or pass his hands across his brows as if they pained him. But he never complained, and the ice, taking on the dull hues of sea and sky, gave off no glare that should affect the sight. Against all opposition Lund forced his way until, just after sunset one night, as the dusk swept down, he gave a shout and pointed to a fitful flare over the port bow. Rainey thought it the aurora, but Lund laughed at him.

"It's the crater atop the island," he said. "Nothin' dangerous. Reg'lar lighthouse. Now, boys," he went on, "there's gold in sight! Whistle for a change of weather, every mother's son of you!"

The deck was soon crowded. On the previous trip the schooner had approached the island from a different angle, but the men were swift to acknowledge the glow of the volcano as the expected landfall. Lund remained on deck, and it was late before any of the crew turned in. Rainey, during his watch, saw the mountain fire-pulse, glowing and winking like the eye of a Cyclops, its gleam reflected in the eyes of the watchers who were about to invade the island and rob it of its golden sands.

The change of weather came about three in the morning, though not as Lund had hoped. A sudden wind materialized from the north, stiffening the canvas with its ice-laden breath, glazing the schooner wherever moisture dripped, bringing up an angry scud of clouds that fought with the moon. The sea appeared to have thickened. The Karluk went sluggishly, as if she was sailing in a sea of treacle.

"Half slush already," said Lund. "We're in for a real cold snap. There'll be pancake ice all around us afore dawn. That is sure a hard beach to fetch. But it's too early for winter closing. After this nip we'll have a warm spell. An' we got to git the stuff aboard an' start kitin' south afore the big freeze-up catches us."

## CHAPTER XV.

### SMOKE.

WHEN Rainey came on deck the next morning he found the schooner floating in a small lagoon that made the center of a floe. The water in it was slush, half solid. Main and fore were close furled, the headsails also, and the Karluk was nosing against the far end of the rapidly diminishing basin. The wind was still lively.

All about were other floes, but they were widely separated, and between them crisp waves of indigo were curling snappily.

The island stood up sharp and jagged, much larger than Rainey had anticipated. It boasted two cones, from one of which smoke was lazily trailing. Ice was piled in wild confusion about its shores, wrecked by the gale that had blown hard from four till eight, and was now subsiding with the swift change common to the Arctic.

A deep hum of bursting surf undertoned all other noises and, prisoned as she was, the schooner and her floe was sweeping slowly toward the land in the grip of a current rather than before the gusty wind.

Lund had fendered the schooner's bows effectively before he went below with old sails that enveloped stem and swell, stuffed with ropes and bits of canvas.

Within an hour the wind had ceased and the slush in the lagoon had pancaked into flakes of forming ice that bid fair to become solid within a short time, for the day was bitterly cold and tremendously bright. The sky rose from filmy silver-azure to richest sapphire, and the rolling waters between the floes were darkest purple-blue. As the whip of the wind ceased they settled to a vast swell on which the great clumps of ice rose and fell with dazzling reflections.

Lund came up within the hour and stood blinking at the brilliance.

"My eyes ain't as strong yit as they should be," he said to Rainey. "I shouldn't have slung them glasses so hasty at Carlsen, though they sp'iled his aim, at that. If this weather keeps up I'll have to make snow-specs; there ain't another pair of smokes aboard." He made a shade of his curved hand as he gazed at the island.

"Current's got us," he said, "an' we'll fetch up mighty close to the beach. It lies between those two ridges, close together, buttin' out from the volcano. Long Strait current splits on Wrangell Island, and we're in the trend of the northern loop. That's why the sea don't freeze up more solid. It's freezin' fast enough round us, where there ain't motion."

He seemed well satisfied with the prospect. "Had breakfast?" he asked Rainey, and then:

"All right. We'll git the men aft."

He bellowed an order, and soon every one came trooping, to gather in two groups either side of the cabin skylight. Their faces were eager with the proximity of the gold, yet half sullen as they waited to hear what Lund had to say. Since the attempt against him Lund had said nothing about their shares. They acknowledged him as master, but they still rebelled in spirit.

"There's the island," said Lund. "We'll make it afore sundown. The beach is there, waitin' for us to dig it up. It 'll be some job. I don't reckon it's frozen hard, on'y crusted. If it is we'll bust the crust with dynamite. But we got to hop to it. There'll be another cold spell after this one peters out an' the next is like to be permanent. I want the gold washed out afore then, an' us well down the Strait. It's up to you to hump yoreselves, an' I'll help the humpin'.

"We'll cradle most of the stuff an', if they's time, we'll flume the silt tailin's for the fine dust. Providin' we can git a fall of water. There'll be plenty for all hands to do. An' the shares go as first fixed. I ain't expectin' you to do the diggin' an' not git a pinch or two of the dust."

The men's faces lighted, and they shuffled about, lookin' at each other with grins of relief.

"No cheers?" asked Lund ironically. "Wall, I hardly expected enny. Hansen, you'll be one of the foremen, with pay accordin'. Deming!"

"I can't dig," said the hunter, truculently. "Neither can Beale, with his ribs."

"You've got a sweet nerve," said Lund. "I reckon you've won enough to be sure of yore shares, if the boys pay up. Enough for you to do some diggin' in yore pockets for you and Beale. His ribs ud be whole if you hadn't started the Bolshie stunt. But I'll find something for both of you to do. Don't let that worry you none."

"We've got mercury aboard somewhere," Lund continued, to Rainey, when the men had dispersed, far more cheerful than they had gathered. "We'll use that for concentration in the film rifles. Hansen 'll have rockers made that 'll catch the big stuff. If the worst comes to the worst, we'll load up the old hooker with the pay-dirt an'

wash it out on the way home. I'll strip that beach down to bedrock if I have to work the toes an' fingers off 'em."

By noon the schooner was glazed in as firmly as a toy model that is mounted in a glass sea. The wind blew itself entirely out, but the current bore them steadily on to the clamorous shore, where the swells were creating promontories, bays, cliffs, and chasms in the piled-up confusion of the floes pounding on the rocks, breaking up or sliding atop each other in noisy confusion.

The marble-whiteness of the ice masses was set off by the blues and soft violets of their shadows, and by a pearly sheen wherever the planes caught the light at a proper slant for the play of prisms. Beautiful as it was, the sight was fearful to Rainey, in common with the crew. Only Lund surveyed it nonchalantly.

"It's all bustin' up fast," he said. "All we need is a little luck. If we ain't got that there's no use of worryin'. We can't blast ourselves out o' this without riskin' the schooner. We ought to be thankful we froze in gentle. There ain't a plank started. The floe 'll fend us off. There ain't enny big chunks enny way near us aft. Luck—to make a decent landin', is all we need, an' it's my hunch it's comin' our way."

His "hunch" was correct. Though they did not actually make the little bay on which the treasure beach debouched, they fetched up near it against a broken hill of ice that had lodged on the sharp slopes of a little promontory, making the connection without further damage than a splitting of the forward end of their encasing floe, with hardly a jar to the Karluk.

Lund sent men ashore over the ice, climbing to the promontory crags with hawsers by which they tied up schooner, floe and all, to the land. If the broken hill suffered further catastrophe, which did not seem likely, its fragments would fall upon the floe. In case of emergency Lund ordered men told off day and night to stand by the hawsers, to cast loose or cut, as the extremity needed.

The main danger threatened from following floes piling up on theirs and ramming over it to smash the schooner, but that was a risk that must be met as it evolved, and there did not seem much prospect of the happening.

It was dark before they were snugged. The men volunteered, through Hansen, to commence digging that night by the light of big fires, so crazy were they at the nearness of the gold. But Lund forbade it.

"You'll work reg'lar shifts when you git started," he said. "An' you won't start till ter-morrer. We've got to stand by the ship ter-night until we find out by mornin' how snug we're goin' to be berthed."

All night long they lay in a pandemonium of noise. After a while they would become used to it as do the workers in a stamp-mill, but that night it deafened them, kept them awake and alert, fearful, with the tremendous cannonading. The bite of the frost made the timbers of the Karluk creak and its thrust continually worked among the stranded masses with groaning thunders and shrill grindings, while the surf ever boomed on the resonant sheets of ice.

The place held a strange mystery. On top of the main cone the volcanic glow hung above the crater chimney, reflected waveringly on the rolling clouds of smoke that blotted out the stars. There were no tremors, no rumblings from the hidden furnace, only the flare of its stoking. The stars that were visible were intensely brilliant points, and, when the moon rose, it was accompanied by four mock moons bound in a halo that widely encircled the true orb. The moon-dogs shone intermittently with prismatic colors, like disks of mother-of-pearl, and the moon itself was fur-rayed.

Under moon and stars the coast snaked away to end in a deceptive glimmer that persisted beyond the eye-range of definite dimensions. And, despite all the sound, muffled and sharp, of splinterings and explosions, of the reverberation of the swell, outside all this clamor, silence seemed to gather and to wait. Silence and loneliness. It awed the crew, it invested the spirits of Peggy Simms and Rainey, gazing at the mystic beauty of the Arctic landscape.

The walls of forced up ice shifted about them and came clattering down, booming on their floe as if it had been a drum, and threatening to tilt it by sheer weight had they not been fairly grounded forward.

Other floes came from seaward to batter at the cliffs, but the eddy that had brought them to their resting-place seemed to have been dissolved in the main current and, save for an occasional alarm, their rear was not seriously invaded.

Only, as the night wore on, the floating masses became cemented to each other and the shore. The Karluk was hard and fast within two hundred yards of her Tom Tiddler's ground, just over the promontory. If a thaw came, all should go well. If Lund had been deceived, and the true winter was setting in early, the prospects were far from cheerful, though no one seemed to think of that possibility.

Beneath the glamor of the magic night, the weird paraselene of the moon's phenomenon, the glow of the volcano, the noises, the men whispered of one thing only—Gold!

Dawn came before they were aware of it, a sudden rush of light that dyed the ice in every hue of red and orange, that tipped the frozen coast with bursts of ruby flame that flared like beacons and gilded the crests of the long swells, tinging all their world with a wild, unnatural glory.

Lund, striding the deck, his red beard iced with his breath, suddenly stopped and stared into the east. There, in the very eye of the dawn, was a trail of smoke, like a plume against the flaming, three-quarters circle of the rising sun!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE MIGHT OF NIPPON.

LUND'S face, on which the bruises were fast fading, changed purple-black with rage. He whirled upon Sandy, gaping near, and ordered him to fetch his binoculars. Through them he stared long at the smoke. Then he turned to the girl and Rainey.

"Come down inter the cabin," he said. "We'll need all our wits!"

"That's a gunboat patrol," he said. "Japanese, for a million! None other this far west. An' it's damned funny it should come up right at this minnit. We've made the trip on schedule time, an' here they show. But we'll let that slide. We've got to think fast. They'll board us. They'll overhaul us for seal pelts. At least, I hope so.

"We've got none. Our hunters an' our rifles an' shotguns 'll prove our claim to be pelagic sealers. We got to trust they believe us. If there was a hide aboard or a club, or a sign of a dead seal on the beaches they'd nail us. They may, ennyway, jest on suspicion.

"They run things out this way with a high hand. If they ever clap us in prison it 'll be where we can't let a peep out of us. A lot they worry about our consuls. They's too menny good sealers dropped out of sight in one of their stinkin' jails to starve on millet an' dried, mouldy fish. I know what I'm talkin' about.

"It's lucky we didn't start mussin' up that beach. But they'll go over everything. I know 'em. They claim to own the seas hereabouts, an' they're cockier than ever, since the war. Rainey, you got to git busy on the log. If yore father didn't keep it up Miss Peggy, so much the better. If he has, you got to fake it someways, Rainey.

"I'm Simms, get me, until we're clear of 'em. An' you, Rainey, are Doc' Carlsen. Nothin' must show in the log about enny deaths."

"But why?" asked the girl. "Why do we have to masquerade? If we haven't touched the seals?"

Lund barked at her.

"I gave you credit for sharper wits," he said. "We've got to have everything so reg'lar they can't find an excuse for haulin' us in an' settin' fire to the schooner. They'd do it in a jiffy. We got to show 'em our clearance papers, an' we've got to tally up all down the line. Rainey ain't on the ship's books—Carlsen is. Lund ain't, but Simms is. I'm Simms. An' you"—he stopped to grin at her—"you're my daughter. I'll dissolve the relationship after a while, I'll promise you that. An' I'll drill the men. They know what's ahead of 'em if the Japs git suspicious.

"That ain't the worst of it! *They may know what we're after.* If they do, we're goners. Ever occur to you, Rainey, that Tamada, who is a deep one, may have tipped off the whole thing to his consul

while the schooner was at San Francisco? He was along the last trip. He'd know the approximate position. Might have got the right figgers out o' the log, him havin' the run of the cabin. A cable would do the rest. He'd git his whack out of it, with the order of the Golden Chrysanthemum or some jig-arig to boot, an' git even with the way he feels to'ard our outfit for'ard, that ain't bin none too sweet to him."

The suggestion held a foundation of conviction for Rainey. He had always sensed depths in Tamada's reserve, he remembered bits of his talk, the "certain circumstances" that he had mentioned. It looked plausible. Lund rose.

"I'll fix Tamada," he said. But the girl stopped him.

"You don't *know* that's true. Tamada has been wonderful—to me. What do you intend to do with him?"

"I'll make up my mind between here and the galley," said Lund grimly. "This is my third time of tackling this island, an' no Jap is goin' to stand between me an' the gold, this trip. Why, even if he ain't blown on us, he'll give the whole thing away. If he didn't want to they'd make him come through if they laid their eyes on him. They've got more tricks than a Chinese mandarin to make a man talk. Stands to reason he'll tell 'em. If he can talk when they git here," he added ominously, standing half-way between the table and the door to the corridor, his hands opening and closing suggestively. "The crew 'd settle his hash if I didn't. They ain't fools. They know what's ahead of 'em in Japan. You, Rainey, git busy with that log. That gunboat 'll have a boat alongside this floe inside of ninety minnits."

But Peggy Simms was between him and the door.

"You sha'n't do it," she said, her eyes hard as flints, if Lund's were like steel. "You don't know what he was to me when —when dad was buried. Call him in and let him talk for himself or—or *I'll tell the Japanese myself what we have come for!*"

Lund stood staring at her, his face hard, his beard thrust out like a bush with the jut of his jaw. Still she faced him, resolute, barely up to his shoulder, slim, defiant.

"I believe you would," he said at last. "An' I'd hate to fix you the way I would Tamada. But, mind you, if I don't git a definite promise out of him that rings true, I'll have to stow him somewheres, where they won't find him. An' that won't be on board ship."

The girl's face softened.

"You said you played fair," she said with a sigh of relief. She stepped to the door, opened it, and called for Tamada. The Japanese appeared almost instantly. Lund closed the door behind him and locked it.

"You know there's a patrol comin' up, Tamada?" he asked. "A Jap patrol?"

"Yes."

"What do you intend tellin' 'em if they come on board?"

"Nothing, if I can help it. I think I can. I am not friendly with Japanese government. It would be bad for me if they find me. One time I belong Progressive Party in Japan. I make much talk. Too much. The government say I am too progressive."

Rainey imagined he caught a glint of humor in Tamada's eyes as he made his clipped syllables.

"So, I leave my country. Suppose I go on steamer I think that government they stop me. I think even in California they may make trouble, if they find me. So I go in *sampan*. Sometimes Japanese cross to California in *sampan*."

"That's right," said Rainey. He had handled more than one story of Japanese crews landing on some desolate portion of the coast to avoid immigration laws and steamer fares. Generally they were rounded up after their perilous, daring crossing of the Pacific. Tamada's story held the elements of truth. Even Lund nodded in reserved affirmation.

"Also I ship on Karluk as cook because of perhaps trouble if some one know me in San Francisco. I think much better if they do not see me. I have a plan. Also I want my share of gold. Suppose that gunboat find me, find out about gold, they will not give me reward. You do not know Japanese. They will put me in prison. It will be suggest to me, because I am of *daimio*

blood "—Tamada drew himself up slightly as he claimed his nobility—" that I make *harikari*. That I do not wish. I am Progressive. I much rather cook on board Karluk and get my share of gold."

Lund surveyed him moodily, half convinced. The girl was all eager approval.

" What is your plan, Tamada?"

" We're losin' time on that log," cut in Lund. " Git busy, Rainey. Look among Carlsen's stuff. He may have kept one. Dope up one an' burn the other. Now, Tamada, it's got to be a good one."

Both Lund and the girl were laughing when Rainey came out into the main-cabin again with the records. Tamada had disappeared.

" He's some fox," said Lund. " Miss Peggy, you better superintend the theatricals. It's got to be done right. Rainey, not to interrupt you, what do you know about enteric fever?"

" Nothing."

" Well, it's the same as typhoid. There'll be a surgeon aboard that gunboat. You got to bluff him. Say little an' look wise as an' owl. Don't let him mix in with yore patient."

" My patient?"

" Tamada! He's got enteric fever. If there's time he'll give you all the dope."

" But I don't see how that—"

" You will see when you see Tamada," Lund grinned. " How about them logs. Can you fix 'em?"

" I think so."

" Then hop to it. I'm goin' to wise up the men and arrange a reception committee. Don't forgit yore name's Carlsen, an' mine's Simms."

Rainey wrote rapidly in his log, erasing, eliminating pages without trace, imitating the skipper's phrasing. Fortunately Simms had made scant entries at first and, later on, as the drug held him, none at all. Carlsen had kept no record that he could find. The girl had gone forward to aid with Tamada's plan which Lund had evidently accepted.

Before he had quite finished he heard the tramp of men on deck and the blast of a steam whistle. He ended his task and went up to see the gunboat, gray and menacing, its brasses glistening, men on her decks at their tasks, oblivious of the schooner, and officers on her bridge watching the progress of a launch toward the floe.

It made landing smartly, and a lieutenant, diminutive but highly effective in appearance, led six men toward the Karluk. He wore a sword and revolver; the men carried carbines. Their disciplined rank and smartness, the waiting launch, the gunboat in the offing, were ominous with the suggestion of power, the will to administer it. The officer in command carried his chin at an arrogant tilt. Lund had rigged a gangway and stood at the head of it, saluting the lieutenant as the latter snappily answered the greeting.

Rainey found the girl and put a hurried question.

" What about Tamada? Where is he? What's the plan."

" He's in the galley, Dr. Carlsen. But he isn't Tamada any more. He's Jim Cuffee, nigger cook, sick with enteric fever, not to be disturbed."

Rainey stared. It was a clever device, if Tamada could carry it out, and he bear his own part in the masquerade. The willingness of Tamada to risk the disguise was assurance of his fidelity.

" Lund should have told me," he said. " I've got to change his name on the papers. It won't take a minute though; he doesn't appear in the log."

The Japanese officer wasted no time on deck. For precaution, Rainey made his alteration in the skipper's cabin, leaving the log there on the built-in desk.

" This is Lieutenant Ito, Dr. Carlsen," said Lund. " You want to see our papers, lieutenant?"

" My orders are to examine the schooner," said Ito, in English, even more perfect than Tamada's. His face was officially severe, though his slant eyes shifted constantly toward the girl. Evidently she was an unexpected feature of the visit.

" I'll get the papers first," said Lund. " Doctor, you an' Peggy entertain the lieutenant." Rainey set out some whisky, which the Japanese refused, some cigars that he passed over with a motion of his hand. He sat down stiffly and ran through the papers.

"We're pelagic, you know," said Lund. "We ain't trespassin' on purpose. Didn't even know you owned the island."

"It is on our charts," said Ito crisply, as if that settled the right of dominion. "How did you come here at all?"

"We was brought," said Lund. "Got froze in north o' Wrangell. Gale set us west as we come out o' the Strait. We're bound for Corwin. Nothin' contraband. All reg'lar. Six hunters, two damaged in the gale, though the doc's fixed 'em up. Twelve seamen, one boy, an' a nigger cook who's pizened himself with his own cookin'. Doc's bringin' him round, too, though he don't deserve it. Want to make yore inspection. We're in no hurry to git away until the ice melts. Take yore time."

The little, dapper officer with his keen, high-cheeked face, and his shoe-brush hair, got up and bowed, with a side glance at Peggy Simms.

"It is not usual for young ladies to be so far north," he said, his endeavor at gallantry obvious.

"I am with my father," said the girl, looking at Rainey, enjoying the situation.

"Where I go she goes," said Lund. And looked in turn at her with relish in his double suggestion. He, too, was playing the game, gambling, believing in his luck, reckless, now he had set the board.

They passed through the corridor. Lund opened up the strong-room, and then the galley. It was orderly, and there was a moaning figure in Tamada's bunk, a tossing figure with a head bound in a red bandanna above the black face and neck that showed above the blankets. The eyes were closed. The black hands, showing lighter palms, plucked at the coverings.

"Delirious," said Lund. "Serves him right. He's a rotten cook."

"Have you all the medicines you need?" asked Ito. "I can send our surgeon."

"I can manage," returned Rainey, *alias* Carlsen. "It's enteric. I've reduced the fever."

They passed on through the hunters' quarters. The girl fell behind with Rainey.

"A good make-up and a good actor," she whispered. "I helped him to be sure he covered everything that would show. It was my idea about the bandanna. Just what a sick negro would wear, and it hid his straight hair."

The lieutenant appeared fairly satisfied, but requested that Lund go on board his ship. He stayed there until sundown, returning in hilarious mood.

"We've slipped it over on 'em this time," he said. "I left 'em aswim with *sake*, an' bubblin' over with polite regrets. But they'll be back in three weeks, they said, if the ice is open. An', if the luck holds, we'll be out of it. I don't want them searchin' the ship agin." He slapped Tamada on the back as he came to serve supper after Sandy had laid the table.

"A reg'lar vodeville skit," he exclaimed. "You're some actor, Tamada! But why didn't you say the island was down on their charts. They've even got a name for it, Hiyama."

"It means hot mountain," said Tamada. "The government names many islands."

"You can bet yore life they do," said Lund. "They're smart, but they overlooked that beach an', they've given us three weeks to cash in."

Lund himself had imbibed enough of the *sake* to make him loose of tongue, added to his elation at the success he had achieved. The gunboat was gone on its patrol, and he had a free hand. He half filled a glass with whisky. "Here's to luck," he cried. And spilled a part of the liquor on the floor before he set the glass to his lips.

"Here's to you, doc," he added. "An' to Peggy!" He rolled eyes that were a trifle bloodshot at the girl.

"Our relations have gone back as usual, Mr. Lund," she said quietly. Lund glared at her half truculently.

"I'm agreeable," he said. "As a daughter, I disown you from now on, Miss Peggy. Here's to ye, jest the same!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A MAN TO HIS MATE.

FROM the day following the arrival and departure of the Japanese gunboat, they attacked the little U-shaped beach that lay between two buttresses of the vol-

cano and sloped sharply down to the sea. Twenty-one men, a lad, and a woman, they went at the despoiling of it with a sort of obsession, led, rather than driven, by Lund, who worked among the rest of them like a Hercules.

From the beginning the tongue of shingle promised to be almost incredibly rich. Between these two spurs of mountain the tide had washed and flung the rich, free-flaking gold of a submarine vein, piling it up for unguessable years. Ebb tides had worked it in among the gravel, floods had beaten it down; the deeper you went to bed-rock, the richer the pan.

The men's fancy estimate of a million dollars began to speedily seem small as the work progressed, systematically stripping the rocky floor of all its shingle, foot by foot, and cubic yard by cubic yard, cradling it in crude rockers, fluming it, vaporizing the amalgam of gold and mercury, and adding pound after pound of virgin gold to the sacks in the schooner's strong-room.

They worked at first in alternating shifts of four hours, by day and night, under the sun, the moon, the stars, and the flaming aurora. The crust was drilled here and there where it had frozen into conglomerate, and exploded by dynamite, carefully placed so as not to dislodge the masses of ice that overhung the schooner. Fires to thaw out the ground were unavailable for sheer lack of fuel; there was no driftwood between these forestless shores. What wood could be spared was conserved for use under the boilers that melted ice to provide water for the cradles and flumes and help to cook the meals that Tamada prepared out of doors for the workers.

Buckets of coffee, stews, and thick soups of peas and lentils, messes of beans with plenty of fat pork, these were what they craved after hours of tremendous endeavor. Despite the cold, they sweated profusely at their tasks, stripping off over-garments as they picked and shoveled or crow-barred out the rich gravel.

Peggy Simms worked with the rest, assisting Tamada, helping to serve with Sandy. Deming and Beale, the man with the damaged ribs, were given odd jobs that they could handle; feeding the fires, washing up, or assisting at the little forge where the drills were sharpened.

Through all of it Lund was supreme as working superintendent. There was no job that he could not, did not handle better than any two of them, and, though Rainey could see a shrinkage, or a compression of his hulk as day by day he called upon it for heroic service, he never seemed to tire.

"Got to keep 'em at it," he would say in the cabin. "No time to lose, an' the odds all against us, in a way, barring luck. That's what we got to count on, but we don't want them thinkin' that. If the weather don't break—an' break jest right, as soon as we've cleaned up, we're stung. Though I'll blast a way out of this shore ice, if it comes to the worst. I saved out some dynamite on purpose."

"We ought to have brought a steam-shovel along," said Rainey. He was hard as iron, but he had had a tough apprenticeship to labor, and his hands and nails, he fancied, would never get into shape again.

"Now you're talkin'," agreed Lund. "We c'ud have handled it in fine shape an' left the machine behind as junk or a souvenir for our Jap friends. We've got to cut out this four-hour shift. Too much time wasted changin'. Too many meals. We'll make it one long, steady shift of all hands long as we can stand up to it, an' all git reg'lar sleep. I'm needin' some myself."

Rainey knew that neither he nor Hansen got within two-thirds as much out of their shifts as when Lund was in command, though he had given them the pick of the men. It was not that the men malingered, they simply, neither of them, had the knack of keeping the work going at top speed and top effectiveness.

But, with Lund handling all of them as a unit, it was not long before the shovels began to scrape on the bare rock that underlay the gravel at tide edge, and work swiftly back to the end of the U. The outdoors kitchen had been established on top of the promontory between the schooner and the beach, a primitive arrangement of big pots slung from tripods over fires kindled on a flat area that was partly sheltered from the sea and the prevailing winds by outcrops of weathered lava.

At dawn the men trooped from the schooner to be fed and warmed, and then they flung themselves at their task. The more they got out the more there was in it for them. But Lund was their overlord, their better, and they knew it. Only Deming worked with one hand the handle of the forge bellows, or fed the fires.

Lund stood a full head above the tallest of them, which was Rainey, and he was always in the thick of the work, directing, demanding the utmost, and setting example to back command. His eyes had bothered him, and he had made a pair of Arctic snow-glasses, mere circles of wood with slits in them. But under these the sweat gathered, and he discarded them, resorting to the primitive device of smearing soot all about his eyes. This, he said, gave him relief, but it made him a weird sort of Caliban in his labors.

On the fifteenth day, with the work better than half done, with more than a ton of actual gold in colors that ranged from flour dust to nuggets, in the strong-room, the weather began to change. It misted continually, and Lund, rejoicing, prophesied the breaking up of the cold snap.

By the eighteenth day a regular Chinook was blowing, melting the sharper outlines of the icy crags and pinnacles, and providing streams of moisture that, in the nights now gradually growing longer, glazed every yard of rock with peril.

The men worked in a muck with their rubber sea-boots worn out by constant chafing, sweaters torn, the blades of their shovels reduced by the work demanded of them, the drills, shortened by steady sharpening, gone like the spare flesh of the laborers, who, at last, began to show signs of quicker and quicker exhaustion and occasional mutterings of discontent, while Lund, intent only upon cleaning off the rock as a dentist cleans a crumbling tooth, coaxed and cursed, blamed and praised and bullied, and did the actual work of three of them.

Dead with fatigue, filled with food, drowsy from the liberal grog allowance at the end of the day, the men slept in a torpor every night and showed less and less inclination to respond, though the end of their labors was almost in sight.

"What's the use, we got enough," was the comment beginning to be heard more and more frequently. "Lund, he's got more 'n he can spend in a lifetime!"

Rainey could not trace these mutterings to Deming's instigation, but he suspected the hunter. There was no poker; all hands were too tired for play.

The ice in which the schooner was packed began to show signs of disintegration. The surface rotted by day and froze again by night and this destroyed its compactness. If the sun's arc above the horizon had been longer, its rays more vertical, the ice must infallibly have melted and freed the Karluk, for it was salt-water ice, and there were times when the thermometer stayed above its freezing point for two or three hours around noon.

Lund gave the holding floe scant attention. So long as the present weather kept up he declared that he could dynamite his way out inside of four hours of labor.

The effect of all this on Rainey was a bit bewildering. He was judging life by new standards far apart from his own modes and, though he, too, worked with a will, and rejoiced in the freer effort of his muscles, the result comparing favorably with the best of the others—save Lund—he could not assimilate the general conditions.

They were too physical, he told himself; he missed his old habits, the reading and discussion of books, new and old, the good restaurants of San Francisco, and the chat he had been used to hold over their tables, companionable, witty, the exchange and stimulation of ideas.

He missed the theaters, the concerts, the passing show of well-dressed women, a hodge-podge of flesh-pots and mental uplift. He got to dreaming of these things nights.

Daytimes, he saw plainly that, in this environment at least, Lund was big, and the rest of them comparatively small. He believed that Lund could actually form a little kingdom of his own, as he had suggested, and make a success of it. But it would not be a kingdom that fostered the arts. It would cultivate the sciences, or at least encourage them and adopt results as applied to land development, and, if necessary, the defense of the kingdom.

Lund would be a figure in war and peace, peace of the practical sort, the kind of peace that went with plenty. He was no dreamer, but a utilitarian. Perhaps, after all, the world most needed such men just now.

As for Peggy Simms, she did not lose the polish of her culture, she was always feminine, even dainty at times, despite her work that could not help but be coarse to a certain extent. She was full of vigor, she showed unexpected strength, she was a source of encouragement to the men as she waited on them. And also a source of undisguised admiration, all of which she shed as a duck sheds water. She was filled with abounding health, she moved with a free grace that held the eye and lingered in the mind. She was eminently a woman, and she also was big.

Rainey gained an increasing respect in her prowess, and a swift conversion to the equality of the sexes. There were times when he doubted his own equality. Had she met him on his own ground, in his own realm of what he considered vaguely as culture, he would have known a mastery that he now lacked. As it was, she averaged higher, and she shed an attraction of sex that was compelling.

Here was a girl who would demand certain standards in the man with whom she would mate, not merely accompany through life. There were times when Rainey felt irresistibly the charm of her as a woman, longed for her in the powerful sex reactions that inevitably follow hard labor. There were times when he felt that she did not consider that he measured up to her gages, and he would strive to change the atmosphere, to dominate the situation in which Lund was the greater figure of the two men.

The rivalry that Lund had suggested between them, as regards the girl, Rainey felt almost thrust upon him. There were moods which Peggy Simms turned to him for sharing, but there was scant time in the waking hours for love-making, or even its consideration.

Lund was centered on one achievement, the gold harvest. He ordered the girl with the rest: there were even times when he reprimanded her, while Rainey burned with the resentment she apparently did not share.

A little before dawn on the eighteenth day of the work upon the beach Lund was out upon the floe, examining the condition of the ice. He had declared that two days more of hard endeavor would complete their labors. What dirt remained at the end of that time they would transship. Rainey had joined the girl and Tamada at the cook fires.

The sky was bright with the aurora borealis that would pale before the sun. The men were not yet out of their bunks. They were bone and muscle tired, and Rainey doubted whether Lund, gaunt and lean himself, could get two days of top work out of them. Near the fires for the cooking, the melting of water and the forge, that were kept glowing all night, the tools were stacked, to help preserve their temper.

The aurora quivered in varying incandescence as Rainey watched Lund prodding at the floe ice with a steel bar. The girl was busy with the coffee, and Tamada was compounding two pots of stew and bubbling peas pudding for the breakfast, food for heat and muscle making.

Sandy appeared on deck and came swiftly over the side of the vessel and up the worn trail to the fires. He showed excitement, Rainey fancied, sure of it as the lad got within speaking distance.

"Where is Mr. Lund?" he panted.

Rainey pointed to Lund, now examining a crack that had opened up in the floe, a possible line of exit for the Karluk, later on. The men were beginning to show on the schooner. They, too, he noted somewhat idly, acted differently this morning. Usually they were sluggish until they had eaten, sleepy and indifferent until the coffee stimulated them, and Lund took up this stimulus and fanned it to a flame of work. This morning they walked differently, abnormally active.

"They're drunk, an' they're goin' on strike," said Sandy. "You know the big demijohn in the lazarette?"

Rainey nodded. It was a two-handled affair holding five gallons, a reserve supply of strong rum from which Lund dis-

pensed the grog allowances and stimulations for extra work toward the end of the shift, the nightcaps and occasional rewards.

"They've swiped it," he said. "Put an empty one from the hold in its place. We got plenty without usin' that one for a while, an' I only happened to notice it this morning by chance. They've bin drinkin' all night, I reckon. They're ugly, Mr. Rainey. It's the seamen this time. They got it. The hunters are sober. Deming ain't in on this. They did it on their own. I don't know how they got it. I didn't get it for 'em, sir. They must have worked plumb through the hold an' got to it that way."

"All right, Sandy. Thanks. Mr. Lund can handle them, I guess. He's coming now."

The men had got to the ice, hidden from Lund, who was walking to the Karluk on the opposite side of the vessel. The seamen were gesticulating freely; the sound of their voices came up to him where he stood, tinged with a new freedom of speech, rough, confident, menacing. As they climbed the trail their legs betrayed them and confirmed the boy's story. Behind them came the four hunters, with Hansen, walking apart, watching the sailors with a certain gravity that communicated itself despite the distance.

Lund showed at the far rail of the schooner with his bar. He glanced toward the men going to work, went below, and came up again with a sweater. He had left the bar behind him in the cabin, where it was used for a stove poker.

The men filed by Rainey, their faces flushed and their eyes unusually bright. They seemed to share a prime joke that wanted to bubble up and over, yet held a restraint upon themselves that was eased by digs in each other's ribs, in laughs when one stumbled or hiccoughed.

But Hansen was stolid as ever, and the hunters had evidently not shared the stolen liquor. Only Deming's eyes roved over the group of men as they gathered round for their cups and pannikins of food. He seemed to be calculating what advantage he could gain out of this unexpected happening.

Peggy Simms, under cover of pouring the coffee, sweetened heavily with condensed milk, found time to speak to Rainey.

"They're all drunk," she said.

"Not all of them. Here comes Lund. He'll handle it."

Lund seemed still pondering the problem of the floe. At first he did not notice the condition of the sailors. Then he apparently ignored it. But, after they had eaten, he talked to all the men.

"Two more days of it, lads, and we're through. The beach is nigh cleared. We can git out of the floe to blue water easy enough, an' we'll git a good start on the patrol-ship. We'll go back with full pockets an' heavy ones. The shares 'll be half as large again as they we've figgered. I wouldn't wonder if they averaged sixteen or seventeen thousand dollars apiece."

Rainey had picked out a black-bearded Finn as the leader of the sailors in their debauch. The liquor seemed to have unchained in him a spirit of revolt that bordered on insolence. He stood with his bowed legs apart, mittened hands on hips, staring at Lund with a covert grin.

Next to Lund he was the biggest man aboard. With the rum giving an unusual coordination to his usually sluggish nervous system, he promised to be a source of trouble.

Rainey was surprised to see him shrug his shoulders and lead the way in silence down to the beach. Perhaps the breakfast had sobered them, though the fumes of the liquor still clung to their breath.

Lund went down, with Rainey beside him, reporting Sandy.

"I'll work it out of 'em," said Lund. "That booze 'll be an expensive luxury to 'em, paid for in hard labor."

They found the men ranged up in three groups. Deming and Beale, against custom, had gone down to the beach. They were supposed to help clean the food utensils, and aid Tamada after a meal, besides replenishing the fires.

They stood a little apart from the hunters and Hansen and the sailors. The Finn, talking to his comrades in a low growl, was in a separate bunch.

There was an air of defiance manifest, a

feeling of suspense in the tiny valley, backed by the frowning cone, ribbed by the two icy promontories. Lund surveyed them sharply.

"What in hell's the matter with you?" he barked. "Hansen, send up a man for the drills an' shovels. Yore work's laid out; hop to it!"

"We ain't goin' to work no more," said the Finn aggressively. "Not fo' no sich wage like you give."

"Oh, you ain't, ain't you?" mocked Lund. He was standing with Rainey in the middle of the space they had cleared of gravel, the seamen lower down the beach, nearer the sea, their ranks compacted. "Why, you booze-bitten, lousy hunky, what in hell do you want? You never saw twenty dollars in a lump you c'u'd call yore own for more 'n ten minnits. You boardin'-house loafer an' the rest of you scum o' the seven seas, git yore shovels an' git to diggin', or I'll put you ashore in San Francisco flat broke, an' glad to leave the ship, at that. *Jump!*"

The Finn snarled, and the rest stood firm. Not one of them knew the real value of their promised share. Money represented only counters exchanged for lodging, food and drink enough to make them sodden before they had spent even their usual wages. Then they would wake to find the rest gone, and throw themselves upon the selfish bounty of a boarding-house keeper.

But they had seen the gold, they had handled it, and they were inflamed by a sense of what it ought to do for them. Perhaps half of them could not add a simple sum, could not grasp figures beyond a thousand, at most. And the sight of so much gold had made it, in a manner, cheap. It was there, a heap of it, and they wanted more of that shining heap than had been promised them.

"You talk big," said the Finn. "Look my hands." He showed palms calloused, split, swollen lumps of chilblained flesh worn down and stiffened. "I bin seaman, not goddam navvy."

Lund turned to the hunters.

"You in on this?" he asked. Deming and Beale moved off. Two of the others joined them. "Neutral?" sneered Lund. "I'll remember that." Hansen and the two remaining came over beside Lund and Rainey.

"Five of us," said Lund. "Five men against twelve f'o'c'sle rats. I'll give you two minnits to start work."

"You talk big with yore gun in pocket," said the Finn. "Me good man as you enny day."

Lund's face turned dark with a burst of rage that exploded in voice and action.

"You think I need my gun, do ye, you pack of rats? Then try it on without it."

His hand slid to his holster inside his heavy coat. His arm swung, there was a streak of gleaming metal in the lifting sun-rays, flying over the heads of the seamen. It plunked in the free water beyond the ice.

"Come on," roared Lund, "or I'll rush you to the first bath you've had in five years. The Finn lowered his head, and charged; the rest followed their leader. The hot food had steadied their motive control to a certain extent, they were firmer on their feet, less vague of eye, but the crude alcohol still fumed in their brains. Without it they would never have answered the Finn's call to rebellion.

He had promised, and their drunken minds believed, that refusing in a mass to work would automatically halt things until they got their "rights." They had not expected an open fight. The spur of alcohol had thrust them over the edge, given them a swifter flow of their impoverished blood, a temporary confidence in their own prowess, a mock valor that answered Lund's contemptuous challenge.

Lund, thought Rainey, had done a foolhardly thing in tossing away his gun. It was magnificent, but it was not war. Pure bravado! But he had scant time for thinking. Lund tossed him a scrap of advice. "Keep movin'! Don't let 'em crowd you!" Then the fight was joined.

The girl leaned out from the promontory to watch the tourney. Tamada, impassive as ever, tended his fires. Sandy crept down to the beach, drawn despite his will, and shuffled in and out, irresolute, too weak to attempt to mix in, but excited, eager to help. Deming, Beale, and the two neutral

hunters, stood to one side, waiting, perhaps, to see which way the fight went, reserves for the apparent victor.

The Finn, best and biggest of the sailors, rushed for Lund, his little eyes red with rage, crazy with the desire to make good his boast that he was as good as Lund. In his Slavic way he was somewhat of a dancer, and his legs were as lissom as his arms. He leaped, striking with fists and feet.

Lund met him with a fierce upper-cut, short-traveled, sent from the hip. His enormous hand, bunched to a knuckly lump of stone, knocked the Finn over, lifting him, before he fell with his nose driven in, its bone shattered, his lips broken like overripe fruit, and his discolored teeth knocked out.

He landed on his back, rolling over and over, to lie still, half stunned, while two more sprang for Lund.

Lund roared with surprise and pain as one caught his red beard and swung to it, smiting and kicking. He wrapped his left arm about the man, crushing him close up to him, and, as the other came, diving low, butting at his solar plexis, the giant gripped him by the collar, using his own impetus, and brought the two skulls together with a thud that left them stunned.

The two dropped from Lund's relaxed arms like sacks, and he stepped over them, alert, poised on the balls of his feet, letting out a shout of triumph, while he looked about him for his next adversary.

The bed-rock on which they fought was slippery where ice had formed in the crevices. Two seamen tackled Hansen. He stopped the curses of one with a straight punch to his mouth, but the man clung to his arm, bearing it down. Hansen swung at the other, and the blow went over the shoulder as he dodged, but Hansen got him in chancery, and the three, staggering, swearing, sliding, went down at last together, with Hansen underneath, twisting one's neck to shut off his wind while he warded off the wild blows of the second. With a wild heave he got on all-fours, and then Lund, roaring like a bull as he came, tore off a seaman and flung him headlong.

"Pound him, Hansen!" he shouted, his eyes hard with purpose, shining like ice that reflects the sun, his nostrils wide, glorying in the fight.

The Finn had got himself together a bit, wiping the gouts of blood from his face and spitting out the snags of his broken teeth. He drew a knife from inside his shirt, a long, curving blade, and sidled, like a crab, toward Lund, murder in his piggy, bloodshot eyes, waiting for a chance to slip in and stab Lund in the back, calling to a comrade to help him.

"Come on," he called. "Olsen, wit' yore knife! Gut the swine!"

Another blade flashed out, and the pair advanced, crouching, knees and bodies bent. Lund backed warily toward the opposite cliff, looking for a loose rock fragment. He had forbidden knives to the sailors since the mutiny, and had forced a delivery, but these two had been hidden. A knife to the Finn was a natural accessory. Only his drunken frenzy had made him try to beat Lund at his own game.

One of the two hunters, lamed with a kick on the knee, howling with the pain, clinched savagely and bore the seaman down, battering his head against a knob of rock. The other friendly hunter had bashed and buffeted his opponent to submission. But Rainey was in hard case.

A seaman, half Mexican, flew at him like a wildcat. Rainey struck out, and his fists met at the top of the breed's head without stopping him. Then he clinched.

The Mexican was slippery as an eel. He got his arms free, his hands shot up, and his thumbs sought the inner corners of Rainey's eyes. The sudden, burning anguish was maddening and he drove his clasped fists upward, wedging away the drilling fingers.

Two hands clawed at his shoulders from behind. Some one sprang fairly on his back, bowing him with his weight. A knee thrust against his spine.

The agony left him helpless, the vertebrae seemed about to crack. Strength and will were shut off, and the world went black. And then one of the hunters catapulted into the struggle, and the four of them went down in a maddened frenzy of blows and stifled shouts.

The sailors fought like beasts, striving

for blows barred by all codes of decency and fair play, intent to main. Lund had got his shoulders against the rocks and stood with open hands, watching the two with their knives, who crept in, foot by foot, to make a finish.

Peggy Simms, a strand of her pale yellow hair whipped loose, flung it out of her eyes as she stood on the edge of the cliff, her lips apart, her breasts rising stormily, watching; her features changing with the tide of battle as it surged beneath her, punctuated with muffled shouts and wind-clipped oaths. She saw Lund at bay, and snatched out her pistol. But the distance was too great. She dared not trust her aim.

Sandy, dancing in and out, willing but helpless, bound by fear and lack of muscle, saw Deming, followed by Beale, stealing up the trail, unnoticed by the girl, who leaned far forward, watching the fight, her eyes on Lund and the two creeping closer with their knives, cautious but determined. Tamada stood farther back and could not see them.

The lad's wits, sharpened by his f'o'c'sle experience, surmised what Deming and Beale were after as they gained the promontory flat and ran toward the fires.

"Hey!" he shrilled. "Look out; they're after the tools!"

Deming's hand was stretched toward a shovel, it's steel scoop sharp as a chisel. Beale was a few feet behind him. They were going to toss the shovels and drills down to the seamen.

Tamada turned. His face did not change, but his eyes gleamed as he thrust a dipper in the steaming remnants of the pea-soup and flung the thick, blistering mass fair in Deming's face. At the same moment the girl's pistol cracked with a stab of red flame. Beale dropped, shot in the neck, twisting like a snake, rolling down the trail to the beach again.

Deming, howling like a scorched devil, clawed with one hand at the sticky mass that masked him as he ran blind, wild with pain. He tripped, clutched, and lost his hold, slid on a plane of icy lava, smooth as glass, struck a buttress that sent him off at a tangent down the face of the cliff, bounding from impact with an outthrust elbow of the rock, whirling into space, and down into the icy turmoil of the waves, flooding into the inlet.

Peggy Simms fled down the trail with a steel drill in either hand, straight across the beach toward Lund. The Finn turned on her with a snarl and a side-swipe of his knife, but she leaped aside, dodged the other slow-foot, and thrust a drill at Lund, who grasped it with a cry of exultation, swinging it over his head as if it had been a bamboo. Hansen had shaken off his men, and came leaping in for the second drill.

The knife fell tinkling on the frozen rock as Lund smashed the wrist of the Finn. The girl's gun made the second would-be stabber throw up his hands while Hansen snatched his weapon, flung it over the farther cliff, and buffeted the seaman to the ground before he joined Lund, charging the rest, who fled before the sight of them and the threat of the bars of steel.

Lund laughed loud, and stopped striking, using the drill as a goad, driving them in a huddled horde, like leaderless sheep, knee-deep, thigh-deep, into the water, where they stopped and begged for mercy while Hansen turned to put a finish to the separate struggles.

It ended as swiftly as it had begun. One hunter could barely stand for his kicked knee, Rainey's back was strained and stiffening, Lund had lost a handful of his beard, and Hansen's cheek was laid open.

On the other side the casualties were more severe. Deming was drowned, his body flung up by the tide, rolling in the swash. Beale was coughing blood, though not dangerously wounded. The Finn was crying over his broken wrist, all the fight out of him. Ribs were sore where not splintered from the drills, and the two bumped by Lund sat up with sorely aching heads. The courage inspired by the liquor was all gone; oozed, beaten out of them. They were cowed, demoralized, whipped.

Lund took swift inventory, lining them up as they came timorously out of the water or straggled against the cliff at his order. Tamada had come down from the fires. Peggy had told of his share, and Sandy's timely shout. Lund nodded at him in a friendly manner.

"You're a white man, Tamada," he said. "You, too, Sandy. I'll not forget it. Rainey, round up these derelicts an' help Tamada fix 'em up. I'll settle with 'em later. Hansen, put the rest of 'em to work, an' keep 'em to it! They got to do the work of the whole bunch."

They went willingly enough, limping, nursing their bruises, while Hansen, his stolidity momentarily vanished in the rush of the fight and not yet regained, exhibited an unusual vocabulary as he bossed them. Lund turned to the two hunters, who had stood apart.

"Wal, you yellow-bellied neutrals," he said, his voice cold and his eyes hard. "Thought I might lose, and hoped so, didn't you? Pick up thet skunk Beale an' tote him aboard. Then come back an' go to work. You'll git yore shares, but you'll not git what's comin' to those who stood by. Now git out of my sight. You can bury That when you come back." He nodded at the sodden corpse of Deming. "You can take yore pay as grave-diggers out of what you owe him at poker. He ain't goin' to collect this trip."

Rainey, lame and sore, helped Tamada patch up the wounded, turning the hunters' quarters into a sick bay, using the table for operation. Beale was the worst off, but Tamada pronounced him not vitally damaged. After he had finished with them he insisted upon Rainey's lying, face down, on the table, stripped to the waist, while he rubbed him with oil and then kneaded him. Once he gave a sudden, twisting wrench, and Rainey saw a blur of stars as something snapped into place with a click.

"I think you soon all right, now," said Tamada.

"You and Miss Simms turned the tide," said Rainey. "If they'd got those tools first they'd have finished us in short order."

"Fools!" said Tamada. "Suppose they kill Lund, how they get away? No one to navigate. Presently the gunboat would find them. I think Mr. Lund will maybe trust me now," he said quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Lund think in the back of his head I arrange for that gunboat to come. He cannot understand how they know the schooner at the island. He think to come jus' this time too much curious, I think."

"It was a bit of a coincidence."

Tamada shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"I think Japanese government know all that goes on in North Polar region," he said. There is wireless station on Wrangell Island. We pass by that pretty close."

Rainey chewed that information as he put on his clothes, wondering if they had seen the last of the gunboat. They would have to pass south through Bering Strait. It would be easy to overhaul them, halt them, search the schooner, confiscate the gold. They were not out of trouble yet.

When he went into the cabin to replace his torn coat—he had hardly a button intact above the waist, from jacket to undershirt—he found the girl there with Lund. Apparently, they had just come in. Peggy Simms, with a face aglow with the excitement that had not subsided, was proffering Lund her pistol.

"Keep it," he said. "You may need it. I've got mine."

"But you threw it into the water. I saw you."

"No." He laughed. "That wasn't my gun. They thought it was. I wanted to bring the thing to grips. But I wasn't fool enough to chuck away my gun. That was a wrench I was usin' this mornin' to fix the cabin stove—hooks jest like an ottermatic. I stuck it in my inside pocket. I was half a mind to shoot when they showed their knives, but I didn't want to use my gun on that mess of hash."

He stood tall and broad above her, looking down at the face that was raised to his. Rainey, unnoticed as yet, saw her eyes bright with admiration.

"You are a wonderful fighter," she said softly.

"Wonderful? What about you? A man's woman! You saved the day. Comin' to me with them drills. An' we licked 'em. We. God!"

He swept her up into his arms, lifting her in his big hands, making no more of her than if she had been a feather pillow, up till her face was on a level with his, pressing her close, while in swift, indignant rage she fought back at him, striking fu-

tilely while he held her, kissed her, and set her down as Rainey sprang forward.

Lund seemed utterly unconscious of the girl's revulsion.

"Comin' to me with the drills!" he said. "We licked 'em. You an' me together. My woman!"

Peggy Simms had leaped back, her eyes blazing. Lund came for her, his face lit with the desire of her, arms outspread, hands open. Before Rainey could fling himself between them, the girl had snatched the little pistol that Lund had set on the table and fired pointblank. She seemed to have missed, though Lund halted, his mouth agape, astounded.

"You big bully!" said Rainey. Now that the time had come he found that he was not afraid of Lund, of his gun, of his strength. "Play fair, do you? Then show it! You asked me once why I didn't make love to her. I told you. But you, you foul-minded bully! All you think of is your big body, to take what it wants.

"Peggy. Will you marry me? I can protect you from this hulking brute. If it's to be a showdown between you and me," he flared at Lund, still gazing as if stupefied, "let it come now. Peggy?"

The girl, tears on her cheeks that were born from the sobs of anger that had shaken her, swung on him.

"You?" she said, and Rainey wilted under the scorn in her voice. "Marry you?" She began to laugh hysterically, trying to check herself.

"I didn't mean you enny harm," said Lund slowly, addressing Peggy. "Why, I wouldn't harm you, gal. You're my woman. You come to me. I was jest—jest sorter swept off my bearin's. Why," he turned to Rainey, his voice down-pitching to a growl of angry contempt, "you pen-shovin whippersnapper, I c'u'd break you in ha'f with one hand. You ain't her breed. But"—his voice changed again—"if it's a showdown, all right.

"If I was to fight you, over her, I'd kill you. D'ye think I don't respect a good gal? D'ye think I don't know how to love a gal right? She's *my* mate. Not yours. But it's up to you, Peggy Simms. I didn't mean to insult you. An' if you want him—why, it's up to you to choose between the two of us."

She went by Rainey as if he had not existed, straight into Lund's arms, her face radiant, upturned.

"It's you I love, Jim Lund," she said. "A man. *My* man."

As her arms went round his neck she gave a little cry.

"I wounded you," she said, and the tender concern of her struck Rainey to the quick. "Quick, let me see."

"Wounded, hell!" laughed Lund. "D'ye think that popgun of yore's cud stop me? The pellet's somewheres in my shoulder. Let it bide. By God, you're my woman, after all. Lund's luck!"

Rainey went up on deck with that ringing in his ears. His humiliation wore off swiftly as he crossed back toward the beach. By the time he crossed the promontory he even felt relieved at the outcome. He was not in love with her. He had known that when he intervened. He had not even told her so. His chivalry had spoken—not his heart. And his thoughts strayed back to California. The other girl, Diana though she was, would never, in almost one breath, have shot and kissed the man she loved. A lingering vision of Peggy Lund's beauty as she had gone to Lund remained and faded.

"Lund's right," he told himself. "She's not of my breed."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE FOG.

LUND glanced at the geyser of spray where the shell from the pursuing gunboat had fallen short, and then at the bank of mist ahead. They were in the narrows of Bering Strait, between the Cape of Charles and Prince Edward's Point, the gold aboard, a full wind in their sails, making eleven knots to the gunboat's fifteen.

It was midafternoon, three hours since they had seen smoke to the north and back of them. Either the patrol had found them gone from the island, freed by blasting from the floe, and followed on the trail full speed, or a wireless on the Tchukchis Coast had told of their homing flight.

The great curtain of fog was a mile ahead. The last shell had fallen two hundred yards short. Five minutes more would settle it. Hansen had the wheel. Lund stood by the taffrail, his arm about Peggy Simms. He shook a fist at the gunboat, vomiting black smoke from her funnel, foam about her bows.

"We'll beat 'em yit," he cried.

The next shell, with more elevation, whined parallel with them, sped ahead, and smashed into the waves.

"Hold yore course, Hansen! No time to zigzag. Got to chance it. Damn it, they know how to shoot."

A missile had gone plum through the main and foresails, leaving round holes to mark the score. Another fairly struck the main topmast, and some splinters came rattling down, while the remnants of the topsail flapped amid writhing ends of halyard and sheet.

They entered the beginning of the fog, curling wisps of it reached out, twining over the bowsprit and headsails, enveloping the foremast, swallowing the schooner as a hurtling missile crashed into the stern. The next instant the mist had sheltered them. Lund released the girl and jumped to the wheel.

"Now then," he shouted, "we'll fool 'em!" He gripped the spokes, and the men ran to the sheets at command while the Karluk shot off at right angles to her previous course, skirting the fog that blanketed the wind, but yet filtered through sufficient breeze to give them headway, gliding like a ghost on the new tack to the east.

Rainey, tense for the explosion of the shell, jumped below at last and came back exultant.

"It was a dud, Lund!" he shouted. "Or else they didn't want to blow us up on account of the gold. But they've wrecked the cabin. The fog's coming in through the hole they made. Tamada's galley's gone. It's raked the schooner!"

"So long's it's above the water line, to hell with it! We'll make out. Listen to the fools. They've gone in after us, straight on."

The booming of the gunboat's forward battery sounded aft of them, dulled by the fog—growing fainter.

"Lund's luck! We've dodged 'em!"

"They'll be waiting for us at the passes," said Rainey. "They've got the speed on us."

"Let 'em wait. To blazes with the Aleutians! Ready again there for a tack! Sou'east now. We'll work through this till we git to the wind agin. It's all blue water to the Seward Peninsula. We're bound for Nome."

"For Nome?" asked Peggy Simms.

"Nome, Peggy! An American port. The nearest harbor. An' the nearest—preacher!"

**(The End.)**

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## A LOVER'S QUARREL

IN violet sweet woods we stray'd
Together, yet apart; a shade
Darkened my Phœbe's love sweet eyes;
Not one fond look could I surprise,
Though subtle arts I long essay'd.

I storm'd, implor'd, wax'd angry, pray'd,
Until—"That girl," she did upbraid,
"In violet!"

Then, petulant yet half afraid,
She turn'd and fac'd me in the glade.
Old world, grown sick of smiles and sighs,
I'll keep, for I am wondrous wise,
The story of the truce we made,
Inviolate.

*Bessie Gray.*

# A Scrap of Paper

by Ray Cummings

"HONEST, Jim, if I had two hundred dollars I'd pay you in a minute," declared the young man earnestly. "But I haven't got it right now, and that's all there is to it."

He looked across the little living-room at his pretty wife, who sat under the piano-lamp quietly sewing, for confirmation of his statement.

"You know how it is, Jim," he added. "We're not broke, exactly. We always have plenty of money—we spend enough, Heaven knows. But right now—to-night—we just haven't got two hundred dollars—nor twenty, for that matter."

Jim Blake twisted a lock of his neatly slicked hair in his fingers and waited impatiently for his friend to finish.

"Now, listen, Charlie," he began earnestly, "you maybe don't understand how important this is to me. I loaned you the money, didn't I? I was a good sport, all right, wasn't I? I never said a word about it—I knew you'd get around to it some time. But now I need it—worse than you did a darned sight when you borrowed it."

"We'll have it next week," Mrs. Allen put in. "You know, Charles only works on commission—we never get regular money. But we have plenty, and there's a lot coming in next week—ask Charles if there isn't." She sighed wistfully and added: "Only somehow it all seems to get spent as soon as we get it."

Charles Allen pulled a check-book from his pocket. "I've got nearly three hundred dollars coming in by this time next week, Jim. But that don't help us if you've got to have the money to-night. And right now, this minute, there's thirteen dollars and thirty cents here. You ought to know what our balance is; you work right in the bank."

"I do," Mr. Blake admitted. "I looked it up to-day."

"All right; then you know. And we make plenty of deposits. Nearly three hundred already this month, wasn't it? I'm darned if I know where it all goes. Frances's fault, I guess." He grinned at his wife good-naturedly.

Young Mr. Blake did not grin. "You don't seem to realize how important this is to me," he said. "And you won't let me tell you—you say you're not interested."

"I am interested, Jim. I'd give it to you in a minute. But how can I give you what I haven't got? Now, if you'd only asked me—"

"You haven't got the cash, Charlie. I don't have to have cash. Your check's all right—I can use that. You'll have plenty of money in a few days."

Charles Allen looked at his friend blankly. "Are you crazy, Jim? Do you think I'm going to draw you a check for two hundred dollars with thirteen in—"

"Why not?" young Mr. Blake interrupted. "There's nothing wrong with that. You just don't understand, that's all. The

bank won't know you've drawn it—your balance won't look any different till the check gets to the bank. And it can't get there till the middle of next week."

"But, Jim—" Mrs. Allen began.

"Honest, Mrs. Allen, it's perfectly all right. I ought to know, oughtn't I? Everybody does it. The account won't be overdrawn till that check gets there. And how can it get there? I'm not going to take it—I'm going to give it to a man who'll deposit it in his bank in New York maybe next Monday or Tuesday. By the time it gets out here you'll have made a deposit. And it 'll help me out of an awful—oh, well, what's the use of that—you said you wanted to help me if you could, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course; but, Jim—"

"You just don't understand, Charlie. It's all a question of credit." Young Mr. Blake's usually sallow face was flushed, and his black eyes sparkled. He leaned forward toward his host, and went on earnestly:

"You've got the money, but you just don't happen to have it in cash. You're good for it—everybody knows that. That's all credit is, anyhow. You draw this two-hundred-dollar check and put it in circulation, and it 'll work just as hard as any other two hundred.

"Why, listen, Charlie—" young Mr. Blake warmed enthusiastically to his theme. "You don't suppose for a minute that all financial transactions mean the passing of real, honest-to-God money, do you? Not on your life—there ain't that much money. Why, if there was no such thing as credit, and everybody had to pass around cash, there wouldn't be one-quarter enough in the world to work with."

"But, Jim—" Mrs. Allen began again timidly.

"What you say is all right, Jim," her husband interrupted, "but suppose I didn't have the money in time to make the check good—then what?"

Young Mr. Blake relaxed in his chair. "But you will have it, won't you? You've got it coming—only you just haven't been paid. Suppose right this minute your firm handed you a check. And suppose—just suppose—that it was a bad check—only you didn't know it. You'd say you had the money then. And you'd use it just like money, wouldn't you? And it would be money, too, up to the time it got back to their bank."

"Yes, but—but if I give you a check I'll have to make a two-hundred-dollar deposit next Tuesday or Wednesday. Suppose I—"

Young Mr. Blake sat up again suddenly. "Suppose you didn't have it to put in? All right, suppose you didn't. Suppose, then, next Tuesday you went to some friend in New York and cashed another two-hundred-dollar check. Then you'd have two hundred in cash—and you'd come out here and deposit it and make the first check good. Then you'd have four or five days more."

There came a short pause, and then seeing that he was making some headway, the visitor continued:

"But you don't have to do that—you'll have the money in a few days. And then—"

"There's the car money, Charles," Mrs. Allen suggested.

Her husband hesitated, while young Mr. Blake looked from one to the other expectantly.

"We sold the flivver yesterday," Allen explained finally. "Going to get a new car in the fall, and we thought the money would help tide us over this pinch."

Young Mr. Blake sighed with relief.

"I phoned the garage to-day," said Mrs. Allen. "He said the man who bought it hadn't paid yet, but he was perfectly good for it, and said he would pay Monday or Tuesday."

"There you are, credit again," said young Mr. Blake. "How much was it for?"

"Two hundred and twenty-five dollars," said Mrs. Allen. "The garage man gets twenty-five commission."

"And that leaves two hundred to pay me with," said young Mr. Blake triumphantly. "You haven't actually got the cash yet, but you're going to use it in advance. And maybe the man who bought the flivver hasn't got the cash, either, right this min-

ute. But I'll bet he's riding around in the car all right. It's the same thing—it's all credit."

Under the fire of this irrefutable logic from his friend, Allen was weakening perceptibly. His visitor saw it and pushed his advantage.

"You want to help me, don't you Charlie? You know I need it—I gotta have it—to-night."

"Yes; but suppose anything went wrong—suppose—"

"How can anything go wrong when—"

"Listen, Jim, I'm perfectly willing to pay you the two hundred."

"We ought to pay it, Charles," Mrs. Allen interjected.

"We've got plenty of money," her husband went on. "We spend it as fast as we get it, but I never spent it ahead of time before."

"Yes, you did," young Mr. Blake put in quickly. "You spend it ahead of time when you run up any bills. Or owe somebody—like me, for instance. It's all a question of credit—it's the same thing."

"Yes, but drawing a check when—"

"How can anything go wrong with me right there in the bank? Don't you suppose the check would come to me first thing? I wouldn't send it back—I'd call you right up—and we'd fix it some way. Besides, what's the use of all that? You'll have the money—you've got it already—you've sold the flivver."

Young Mr. Blake drew a fountain pen from his pocket. "Come on, Charlie," he urged, "be a good sport, like I was. I helped you, and you know you got twice as much money as I have. This 'll help me out of a deuce of a mess."

And most reluctantly Allen drew the check.

When young Mr. Blake got outside ten minutes later with the check for two hundred dollars safely tucked away in his inside pocket, he walked rapidly down the dimly lighted, maple-lined avenue on which the Allens lived, in the direction of the Rosewood Country Club.

He had considerably over a mile to go, and when he got to the club it was nearly ten o'clock. Without difficulty he located the gentleman he had come to meet—a portly, prosperous-looking, middle-aged individual, seated comfortably in a corner of the clubhouse porch smoking and contemplating the serenity of the moonlit golf-course.

Young Mr. Blake dropped into a chair beside him. "Good evening, Mr. Cameron—I thought you'd still be here. I got the two hundred, all right."

Mr. Cameron took his feet down from the porch railing and shook the proffered hand. "Hello, Blake. Great night, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it is," young Mr. Blake agreed. "I got the two hundred—you're sure that 'll be enough?" He reached into his inside pocket. He was breathing fast—partly from the exertion of his walk and partly because, now that he was about to use this check which he knew was at the moment, at least, without value, the glib theories he had expounded to Allen did not seem so reasonable.

Mr. Cameron's eyes twinkled. "You never were made for a speculator, Blake."

"You're right I wasn't, Mr. Cameron. You get me out of this, and I'll let Wall Street alone—I know when I'm beat. They got too much class down there for me—I'll stick to poker if I have to gamble." He produced the check.

"Check for two hundred dollars—Charles Allen—you know him, Mr. Cameron—he owed it to me. Will that be enough to protect me?"

Mr. Cameron took the check. "It was only to-morrow I was afraid of," he said. "And it's a short day. Monday they'll rally and go right on up. They'll be back where you got in within two weeks."

"When they get there you get me out," said young Mr. Blake. He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "You're right—I'm no speculator."

Mr. Cameron turned the check over in his hand. "I'll take this in to-morrow morning and put it to your credit. Just put your name here." He handed it back, and young Mr. Blake endorsed it.

Mr. Cameron slipped the check into a handsomely monogramed leather wallet. "I suppose it's a good check, Blake," he remarked jocularly, and grinned.

Young Mr. Blake swallowed hard. "Ye-es, sir; I suppose so."

"Well, you ought to know," said Mr. Cameron, "being right in the bank, so I guess I'll have to chance it." He rose to his feet and offered his hand as a touring-car came up the drive.

"Mrs. Cameron coming for me," he said. "We've got to go out now and burn up some gasoline. I'll let you know Monday how things are going."

Two hours later, when Mr. and Mrs. Cameron got home, he remarked.

"That young fellow Blake gave me a check for two hundred dollars to-night to bolster up his account—check of Charles Allen."

Mrs. Cameron stopped in the act of laying aside her automobile wraps. "Two hundred dollars—I don't know where they'd get all that money—they owe everybody in town. Why, Mrs. Allen was just telling me last night they sold their—"

"That is what I was thinking." With an expertness born of long practise, Mr. Cameron deftly interrupted his wife. "It's a check drawn on the bank here, where you keep your housekeeping account, so I thought I'd give it to you to deposit."

"I don't want it if it's a bad check," declared Mrs. Cameron. "Why, only last night Mrs. Allen told me—she talks every minute, you know—tells you everything in her head—she said—"

"And so if I give you this two hundred," went on Mr. Cameron, "that will fix you up until the middle of next month—right?"

"Yes, but—"

"And I guess it won't hurt you to have some in advance—you probably owe everybody in town, too."

"They know I'm good for it," Mrs. Cameron retorted. "All they have to do is ask me—I'll pay them any time. Besides, George, you seem to think I can run this table on forty dollars a week. You don't realize how prices have—"

"Here is the check," said Mr. Cameron. "If it isn't good I'll make it good. You put it in the bank to-morrow morning."

Nathan Levy's grocery was the classiest in Rosewood. His many shelves were neatly stocked with all the finest, best advertised brands of canned goods he could buy. His prices were as high as he dared make them, and his trade was good. All the best people of Rosewood dealt with him—telephone orders mostly.

Business was thriving with Mr. Levy in a way—and in a way it wasn't. According to his books he was making plenty of money. But this was Mr. Levy's first year in Rosewood, and the luxurious appointments of his store had entirely depleted his capital.

Dealing with classy people had its disadvantages, Mr. Levy soon found. They paid any price you charged, but they only paid it by letting their bills run up. And if you dunned them they got insulted and took their trade away, because you ought to know they were good for it.

On this particular Saturday morning Mr. Levy was a very much annoyed, not to say alarmed individual. He put his hands on his hips and truculently surveyed his unwelcome visitor across the highly polished grocery counter.

"He means it this time." The visitor shoved his derby hat on the back of his head and leaned toward Mr. Levy confidentially. "For your own good I'm telling you he means it. Out you go Monday or Tuesday—as soon as he can get the dispossess papers, and that's easy for him in this little burg. I'm telling you if I don't go back right now with two months' rent—at the very least—it's all off."

"Two weeks ago you talked just like that," said Mr. Levy.

"Yes, but this time he means it. Nothing doing on the stall—he's through with that—for your own good I'm telling you—and I know him. Out you go."

The visitor made an expressive gesture of ejection with his hands that sent a shiver down Mr. Levy's chubby little back.

"How could I give it to you if I haven't got it?" Mr. Levy waved his hands violently.

"I got plenty money—everybody in Rosewood owes me money. But how could I pay you—be reasonable—I ask it, how could I pay you if they don't pay me?"

"Search me," said the man across the

counter with a shrug. "That's for you to worry about—not us. But I'm telling you for the last time—"

"I should give them all long credit, my customers expects. And I ask you, then, why ain't my credit good with you?"

"Well, it ain't," said the man across the counter shortly. "Not no more. And you better dig up right now—two months. You had better take my advice—this is the finish."

Mr. Levy met his steady gaze and was convinced. "Maybe I could do it—wait," he announced hopefully, and leaving his visitor abruptly he entered his little office at the back of the store.

His ledger showed a truly fabulous amount of money due him. Mr. Levy sighed as he ran over the accounts—big profit accounts, all of them. And his soul was torn with anguish at the thought of losing any one of them by an unseemly request for payment.

In the C's he ran across the name of Cameron. "They could buy the mint with their money," murmured Mr. Levy wistfully to himself. Mrs. Cameron's bill stood at two hundred and seventy odd dollars. Reluctantly Mr. Levy reached for the telephone.

"Ah, good morning, Mrs. Cameron," he began, when the connection had been made. "Yes, ma'am, it could be there any minute, all but the asparagus. What I want to say—you're a good customer, Mrs. Cameron—Well, I thought maybe you could let me have a little something on account— Believe me, it isn't that, Mrs. Cameron—you could owe me a million dollars— No, sure I know it ain't big yet— Yes, but— Yes, sure, but—yes; but just as a favor to me, Mrs. Cameron, this morning, so I could meet a bill I got here. Maybe a couple of hundred? Oh, no, believe me, Mrs. Cameron, it ain't that. With me its like the Bank of England, your account— If you could do it— Couple of hundred, maybe, yes— Sure, it's all right, a check of Mr. Allen."

Mr. Levy gave a long sigh of relief and mopped his dripping forehead with his free hand. "You just put your name on it, Mrs. Cameron. That makes it all right with me— Yes, right away, the boy comes with the asparagus— You could give him the check then."

Mr. Levy hung up after profuse thanks and rejoined his visitor in the store.

"In ten minutes I give you a check for two hundred dollars," he announced. "Check from Mr. Allen, one of my very best customers. That makes it all straight and right between me and you, don't it?"

Elias Hoskins owned perhaps two dozen buildings in Rosewood. Nobody knew much about old man Hoskins. His real-estate office was the least pretentious of the many that bloomed in the village. One man-of-all-work and a stenographer comprised his entire office force. Those who rented from Elias Hoskins called him a profiteer; those who tried to collect money from him called him a miser. As a matter of fact, probably he was neither.

In Hoskins's decrepit little office on this same Saturday morning the old man sat with his back to his desk and faced a stalwart, boyish-looking chap in overalls. The atmosphere of the room at this particular moment was redolent with the odor of gasoline and grease, in spite of the fact that old man Hoskins was puffing savagely at his cigar.

"Don't get mad," said the young man in overalls, grinning pleasantly.

"I'll pay when I get ready. You can tell your father that," snapped old man Hoskins.

"Why not now? We delivered you the flivver—you're using it."

"I tell you I'll pay when I get ready. Ain't that enough? And if your father don't like it you can have the car back—I don't want it. And I'll put my other car in some other garage. Tell your father that."

"The other garage is too far from where you live," remarked the young man in overalls.

Old man Hoskins grinned in spite of himself. "All right, boy; you try it and see."

The young man in overalls hitched his chair forward. "You're all right, Mr. Hoskins. They don't get you around this

town, do they? But you're not really so bad as you're painted." He leaned forward confidentially.

"Father really needs this money—this and a bunch of other bills he's sent me out to collect. It isn't only the two twenty-five for the flivver. The man who owned it wants it right away, and father promised he'd get it. But besides that, you owe us that much more, Mr. Hoskins—nearly four months now on the other car. Father needs that, too. He's in a rotten hole—everybody in the place is threatening to strike. I'm supposed to be back in college in another month. You think I'm going? No, sir—I'm going to be a garage mechanic this winter.

"Now, you've got plenty of money, Mr. Hoskins. You pay this bill—some of it, anyway. Pay for the flivver—so father can give the man his money."

Old man Hoskins choked back with difficulty the habitual crusty retort that sprang to his lips. He liked this smiling young man somehow.

"So I've got plenty of money?" he demanded. "I get taxes and insurance and labor and materials for repairs on credit? Do you think I do? And nearly every tenant I've got is a month or two in arrears. And every laboring man I employ to do repairs makes more money than I do myself. And everybody thinks I'm rich. I'm a profiteer because I'm a landlord."

The young man in overalls grinned but said nothing.

"I'd pay your bill if I had the money handy," added old man Hoskins. "But I haven't."

The office door opened and a man in a black derby hat entered unceremoniously. "I scared him to death this time—not a chance to stall."

The newcomer drew a slip of paper from his pocket and laid it on old man Hoskins's desk with a flourish.

"Two months—two hundred dollars. I had him faded to a standstill, I'm telling you."

He slung his derby hat on a rack and passed through to the rear office.

The young man in overalls stared for one brief instant. Then he reached over and picked up the slip of paper. "A check of Charles Allen!" he exclaimed—he was grinning broadly now. "Why, he's the man from whom you bought the flivver, Mr. Hoskins—now what do you know about that!"

Old man Hoskins reached for the check, but his visitor held it away from him. "Be a good sport, Mr. Hoskins," he pleaded. "Put your name on this and give it to me. It 'll pay for the flivver—we'll let the twenty-five go on the bill till some other time. It 'll help us out a lot. You never expected to get it, anyway."

Young Mr. Blake had lunch with the Allens that same Saturday noon as a preliminary to a game of golf. Near the end of the meal the conversation drifted around to the check that Allen had given Blake the night before.

"That bad check idea worries me a lot, Jim," said Allen. "Here, wait, have some more ice-cream."

"I phoned the garage again this morning," said Mrs. Allen. "Mr. Horton said positively that I needn't worry—that he would guarantee the payment."

"I wish you'd have suggested maybe that he advance the money," said her husband.

"What's the difference," put in young Mr. Blake, "so long as you get it in time to make the check good?"

"I *did* tell him we needed the two hundred dollars very badly," said Mrs. Allen. "He was awfully nice—said he'd send it up just as soon as he got it."

The maid entered. "A young man from Horton's garage, sir." She handed a sealed envelope and a sheet of paper to Mr. Allen. "He said would you please sign the receipt and let him take it back. The money's in the envelope."

"The money for the car!" exclaimed Mrs. Allen.

"Fine!" said young Mr. Blake. "Now everything's all right about the check."

The master of the house signed the receipt and handed it back to the maid. Then he tore open the envelope carelessly, and amid dead silence laid his own worthless check on the table before them.

# Crossroads

## A SEQUEL TO "LUCK"

by John Frederick

Author of "Luck," "The Hammer," etc.

### CHAPTER XXX.

DELORES FINDS A MAN.

UNDOUBTEDLY there was more of the child than the woman in the soul of Dolores. It was an impulse of childish curiosity which carried her away from the house of Señor Onate while he sat talking with Garcia. She went to her room first and wrapped herself in a dark-blue cloak, and then walked straight to the jail of Double Bend.

The jailer had seen her only once before, but he remembered her perfectly, for the favorite of Señor Onate, was not one to be lightly forgotten. So he smiled on her amiably when she appeared at the door of the jail.

"I have come from Señor Onate," she said coldly to the jailer, "and I bring a message from him to Señor Dix Van Dyck, the man whom El Tigre captured. Let me see him at once, and alone."

If the heart of the jailer beat faster with anger at this haughty speech, he taught it to beat more calmly again at once by simply recalling the greatness of Onate.

"Alone?" he objected. "That is against the rules."

"However," said the girl, in her faultless Spanish, which she had learned from the grave vocabulary of El Tigre, "it is the will of the sheriff. Let me see Señor Van Dyck at once, sir."

"If it's an order," said the jailer, "let me see the writing."

"Order?" she repeated, with a rising emphasis that made her voice shrill. "If you send back to Señor Onate for a written order—"

"Well?" said the jailer, who could not be bullied too far.

She changed her tactics with the speed of light. Both her hands went out to him, palm up, in a graceful gesture of entreaty. She smiled upon the jailer.

"If I go back and say that I have not given his message I shall be beaten, *señor*."

And she drew the cloak tighter about her with a little shudder, as though in fancy she already felt the lash on her soft shoulders. The jailer was a man, and being a man, as the logic-book tells us, he was mortal. He looks upon Dolores and her smile. He sighed.

"If it is that," he said at last, "I shall step past the rules with one eye closed. You shall see Dix Van Dyck."

So he went to his safe and took his big, rusty key. With this in his hand like a truncheon, a sign of dignity and power, he led the girl down the first flight of steps in the basement, and finally unlocked the door which led down the last passage.

The musty stench and the gloom rolled out to meet them. The girl recoiled with a little exclamation—a harsh guttural in her native tongue—instinct with horror. One passion possessed her—the passion for liberty which ennobles her race.

"I have asked," she said, with a gesture of dignity and repulsion, "to see a man, not the kennel of a dog."

The jailer handed her his lantern with a grin.

"Down to the bottom of those steps, my girl," he said, "and you'll see the kennel of Dix Van Dyck."

"A man?" she said, in the same tone of horror. "A man down there—there?"

It might have been the horrors of hell which her slender forefinger indicated. The jailer was touched by the implication that he was at fault.

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"It was orders, not my wish," he said, "and we have no strong place to keep fighting men; no strong place but this one."

"Is he dangerous?" she asked curiously.

"Is a mild mustang dangerous?" returned the jailer, perfectly willing to retain this beauty in conversation. "Is a mountain-lion dangerous when she has hungry young ones in her cave?"

"So?" said the girl. "And yet El Tigre took him!"

"It is true, "nodded the jailer, "but he took him by a trick. He paid the price of a woman, and for the sake of the woman Dix Van Dyck went with El Tigre."

"Then he is a fool—a donkey," said the girl scornfully, "to have paid so much for a woman. He could buy a dozen women for a tenth of that price."

"It is true," said the jailer. "He is a fool."

"And yet—" said the girl, and paused. "He has killed men?"

"Count all your pretty fingers and all your little toes, my dear," said the jailer, "and he has killed more men than that."

"It is true!" she gasped, incredulous. "El Tigre is not so terrible as that."

"He would eat three like El Tigre," answered the jailer calmly, "and still think he had done a small day's work. So we took no chances, and put him here. Also, the sheriff ordered that it be done."

"So!" said Dolores. "I will go down to look at him."

She raised the lantern over her head and peered down the flight of sweating steps with a shudder of disgust.

"You are not afraid?" queried the jailer in admiration.

"Bah!" she said, though her voice was hushed. "He is soft flesh, and I carry sharp steel."

She touched the hilt of her knife and began to descend the steps with sudden eagerness.

"You should have been a man," said the jailer, calling after her. "We could use men like you in the jail."

At the bottom of the steps, as the jailer had promised, she found the bars of steel, and behind them the form of what seemed to Dolores the largest man she had ever seen. It was shadowy at first, and so huge that she stopped short and bit her lip to keep back the cry of terror.

Then she made herself approach the bars more closely, holding the lantern as high as she could reach.

The light fell on a large, shaggy head, which turned slowly toward her. She stopped short again, awed by the glimmer of the eyes. Then she saw a rough face, unshaven for many days. But the sharp, hard line of jaw and cheekbone could not be disguised by that stubble of unkempt beard. It did not cover the high-arched, cruel nose, nor the shag of eyebrows over the light of the undaunted eyes, nor the straight line of the thin lips.

She gazed, fascinated. She drank in every detail of the picture again and again; and still the man stared back unblinking.

This man had thrown himself away for the sake of a woman! She would have as soon suspected that there was a heart of love in a wild wolf—a timber wolf, which will attack a man.

"I am Dolores," she said, "the daughter of El Tigre."

He made no answer.

"I have not come to look at you because my father brought you here."

Still he would not speak.

"I have come because I want to thank you for saving the life of my father, El Tigre. He is like a tiger. He speaks little, but the heart of El Tigre is heavy because you must die."

The man stood up and looked down at her, and standing erect he was too tall for the ceiling, so that he had to stand with his head bent forward. It gave the impression that he was peering down at her from a great height.

"Go tell El Tigre, Dolores," he said, and there was a marvelous lack of harshness in his voice, "that Dix Van Dyck holds no grudge against him. El Tigre is a square shooter. Tell him that Dix Van Dyck says so. And if I ever get out if this hell-hole I'll never make a move to harm him. Is that clear?"

"Alas! *señor,* you will never leave this place alive!"

"No? Dolores, I'm a hell of a long ways from being dead."

She shook her head.

"What d'you know?" he asked, and strode forward with a single long stride to the bars.

Standing there in the keener light of the lantern, she did not think him so vast, but she found his face more terrible. She could have believed anything desperate and cruel about a man with a face such as that, but she could not dream that he would throw himself away for a woman. She felt an overmastering desire to see the face of that woman.

"What d'you know?" repeated the giant.

"I cannot tell."

His hand shot through the bars and caught her shoulder with a tremendous power. One pressure of that hand would have crushed her throat, and she knew it. And all the blood rushed to her heart, but still she did not make a move to draw her knife.

"There's crooked work on," said Van Dyck, "and you know what it is. Out with it, girl!"

She shook her head.

"By God!" he said with a sort of dull wonder, "I don't think you're afraid of me, Dolores."

"Ah, *señor*," she murmured, "shall Dolores fear a man who dies for the sake of a woman?"

"Bah!" sneered the big man, "they've been filling your ears with chatter. All lies, Dolores, all lies. I did nothing for the sake of a woman. Well, if you won't tell me, go back to your father and give him my message. I've nothing but good-will for El Tigre."

"*Señor*," she said, "I have been in the church. The father has taught me prayers. I shall pray for you thrice every day."

She remembered with a start, and caught a hand to her eyes with a moan of horror.

"But to-morrow night, *señor!*"

He waited, eager.

"It is then that you die. Many men will come."

She drew her dagger and offered it to him. He accepted the hilt and stood staring at the long, keen blade.

"They will not kill you here. Let them take you, and when they have brought you out into the open, then spring on them with this knife. Can you use a knife, *señor?*"

"My girl," said Dix Van Dyck softly, "it's second nature to me. Use a knife?"

His large head tilted back, and he laughed softly—softly. The terror of the sound fascinated her so that she still listened after the laughter died away.

"*Señor, señor,*" she murmured, "you were not meant to die like a dog—in a kennel!"

Then, checking herself as one who said too much, she said: "I must leave you."

She held out her hand, and he caught it eagerly.

"Heart of gold!" he breathed. "Girl, I'll be ready to welcome the damned greasers when they come to-morrow. This knife—it's teeth to me! Good-by, Dolores."

"No, No!" she cried. "Not good-by, *señor*. Only *adios*. *Adios amigo.*"

And she fled up the stairs, panting, wild-eyed, like one who was being pursued.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### EL TIGRE COVERS HIS HEAD.

STRAIGHT back to the house of Señor Don Porfirio Maria Onate went Dolores. He was at the opening of the main doorway to the patio, and as she passed he merely lifted his glance to her and let it fall again, heavily.

She knew he was very angry—angrier than she had ever dreamed he could be.

She went straight back through the house and to the room which had been assigned to El Tigre, apart from the servants' quarters, for not even so great a man as Señor Onate could rank El Tigre among servants.

She found her father sitting on a mat, cross-legged, and with his arms folded. It was the first time they had been together since the day he returned from the trail of Dix Van Dyck, and now he rose and stood looking out the window.

The girl set her teeth in silent fury, and placed her hand on the door-knob to retreat. She had actually swung the door open, in fact, when something conquered her pride. She closed it decisively, and walked up to the tall Yaqui.

"It is I, Dolores," she said angrily.

He turned partially toward her at that, but his eyes still avoided her.

"El Tigre," he said solemnly, "is very weary. He wishes to be alone and sleep."

"Bah!" cried the girl with sudden fury. "El Tigre has slept for many days; his honor has slept with him."

His upper lip writhed back from his teeth, and his hand shot across to the hilt of his knife. At that a glint of terror came in the eyes of the girl, but she persisted with a perverse delight, like one who baits a bull. But here was one who would not charge blindly.

"The claws of El Tigre are bare," she went on, "but they are dull. The tiger is old; his claws are blunt; his teeth have fallen out; he is fat and slow; very soon little boys will bait him in the streets and kick his fat ribs and laugh to see him grunt. And El Tigre will dare not bite, but lick their hands for crusts of bread. It is true!"

Half the length of the knife-blade flashed and disappeared again in the sheath, a motion as swift as a winking of light.

"Does El Tigre still show his teeth?" went on the girl, though she retreated half a pace, ready to flee like the wind for the door. "I do not fear him. There has been a hand on my shoulder that has three times the strength of El Tigre's paw. I felt that hand. Why should I fear El Tigre's? The hand which was on my shoulder was the hand which dragged El Tigre out of the river—"

"Dolores has spoken too much," said El Tigre, and turned upon her with eyes more deadly than his voice.

She said: "The hand drew El Tigre out of the river and threw him on the bank like a drowned cat to dry his fur. And when El Tigre could stand again he sneaked on his white father and bit the hand that had saved him. It is true!"

"It is true," repeated El Tigre, and gave no sign of his torture.

"And now," said the girl, "Onate is setting a trap for El Tigre. It may be that he will catch him and whip him and let him go—tamed."

"Ah," murmured El Tigre.

"Your master and mine," said the girl; "the master of El Tigre and his daughter."

The Indian drew himself a little more erect, if that were possible.

"El Tigre has no daughter," he said calmly. "He dreamed that he had a daughter named Dolores. Now El Tigre is awake."

"It is a lie," said Dolores. "El Tigre is not awake. He sleeps and waits for Onate to catch him. A sleepy tiger fat with too much eating; the boys of the town will bait him."

She stepped a little closer, fearless, though she saw the death in the eyes of the Yaqui.

"Why do you wait, El Tigre?" Onate has seen you stalk him with silent feet. He is a fool, but he knows. His eye is on you. Why do you wait? If you wish to find him when he sleeps I will open his door to-night. But there is little time."

"I would have killed him three times in three days," said the Yaqui calmly, "but every time, if I had struck, his blood would have fallen on Dolores."

She winced as if under the whip, and her breath came sharply, with a sort of stifling sob.

"And now," she said, "it is too late. You may kill Onate, but the white father shall die."

For the first time he was roused past his self-restraint.

"It is a lie," he said; "the father of lies."

"It is true," she answered; "I have heard Onate talk with Garcia. To-morrow Garcia will raise a crowd. A crowd of Mexicans to take the jail and carry off the white father to the hills. There they will pile up mesquite wood and burn him."

The last glow of the sunset struck through the window across the face of El Tigre and made it terrible. It gleamed on the sweat of his forehead.

"But why do—you—tell El Tigre?" she said scornfully. "He loves the Mexicans. They have burned his village. They killed his son with fire. They butchered his brother with knives. They cut the throat of his father. But El Tigre has forgotten. He eats the food from the hand of a Mexican. His teeth are so dull that if he bit that hand he would not break the skin. He crouches before a master—he—El Tigre!"

"Once he was wild and strong. The dark was like the day to El Tigre. His coming made no sound. It was like the plunge of the eagle through the air with wings closed.

His going was as silent as the passing of a feather on the wind.

"And when he struck, men died. His enemies fear him more than fire and bullets. His friends were tied closer to him than ropes can bind.

"But now El Tigre is fat and old. He would rather have a full belly than be called The Tiger. It is true. His white father he leaves to rot in a dark place where the sun never strikes. But Onate, who will hunt El Tigre before long, El Tigre crouches before Onate and licks his hand. He has given Onate the life of his white father; he has given Onate his daughter to keep."

"Ah!" said the Yaqui, and made a step toward her, but checked himself and folded his arms tightly.

"Men see these things, and laugh," said the girl. "Men smile at the name of El Tigre. They say that the soul of El Tigre has gone and the soul of a coyote come to live in his hide. He has nothing left but his growl, and his teeth are fallen out, and his claws are blunt."

His eyes, wherever they rested on her, were like the stroke of a knife, but otherwise he endured her lashing tongue with marvelous strength. She changed her tone suddenly.

"I have been to the white father. I have told him that I am the daughter of El Tigre, and I lied to him and told him that the heart of El Tigre bled for the sake of his white father. But he is a man. He smiled on me and said that he forgave El Tigre. He made me come back to you; he made me swear to comfort my father, and tell him that Señor Van Dyck holds him as close as a friend."

"Is it true?" said El Tigre hoarsely.

"By all the blood in my heart," she swore, "it is true. This, and other things. What will you do, El Tigre?"

In place of answering, he turned his back on her again and sat down on the mat.

And as the girl looked at him, all the fire and fierceness went out of her face and left only the embers of her passion burning in her eyes. A little sound of dole, no louder than the hum of a bee, came in her throat, and she stretched out her arms to the stiff, stern back of El Tigre.

He did not know. He would never know. Then she stole back toward the door, and as she opened it she saw El Tigre raise an end of his blanket and wrap it about his head. The heart of Dolores stood still.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### SPORTING CHANCE.

STRAIGHT overhead stood the sun; the shadow of the mesquite bush before the door of the shanty had shrunk to nothingness. A time of fierce heat—white heat. The shadow of the hut was hardly a relief, for it shut off the faint touch of the breeze. Perspiration trickled down the red nose of Bill Lawton; and the face of the girl was pale. There was silence in the hut, a deep, long silence as heavy as sleep, but more ominous than the silence of a man who watches a snake coiled within striking distance of his feet.

The meaning of the silence lay in the pile which mounted on the board on either side of and in front of Jacqueline. In that stack were gold and silver coins, a few paper bills, the golden braid from the sombrero of Noony, the sombrero and bright bandanna of Bill Lawton, two pairs of spurs, two revolvers, a great hunting-knife, a silver watch of great size, a diamond ring of respectable proportions, and a score of odds and ends.

The silence held; the eyes of the losers fixed as if fascinated on the pile of loot, and the eyes of the girl went from one to the other. They were stunned, grim. When they began to think their thoughts would be dangerous.

There was no such oblivion in the mind of the girl. Her brain was working hard and fast, and the thought of the loot was certainly not in it. Suddenly she pushed the pile of winnings to the center of the board.

"Gents," she said easily, "pick out your things."

Noony straightened with such a jerk that it forced a grunt through his set teeth. And Bill Lawton stared at her with haggard eyes. He would rather have lost his right hand than the revolver which was among that

loot. He pulled at his collar and loosened it, though it was already inches too large.

"Pick out your stuff," she said. "I been playing this game to kill time, not to pick up your coin. That's straight."

The hand of Bill Lawton flashed out for his gun; but he checked that hand half-way to the pile. For his heart was deeply troubled.

"It can't be done," he said at last, huskily. "Partner, I c'n see your square, but I ain't never taken a gamblin' debt as a gift before, and I don't intend to do it now. That's final."

To strengthen himself against temptation, he rose and turned his back on the pile of loot, and stood at the door with his hands clenched behind his back.

"Well," said the girl, as if a new idea had suddenly come to her, "there's one thing left to play for. I'll stake everything here against a chance for me to break away and get to Double Bend before sunset."

Bill Lawton whirled as if he were pulling a gun and started to speak, Noony all the time begging him with his eyes to accept the chance, but the gunman shook his head.

"You being square," he said at last, "I can't make that play. Lady, you ain't got no ghost of a show to get to Double Bend before sunset. Dix Van Dyck is done. You can lay to that. They ain't no hoss in these parts can make that trip in that time."

"All I want is the chance," she said. "I don't ask for a sure thing. All I want is a sporting chance."

"A sporting chance?" repeated Bill Lawton.

"After all," she urged, "all the dope is against me to win this bet. I've won the last five straight. It's too much to expect. It's simply an easy way for you to win back your coin and things. And I'll have to stay here till sunset."

"Noony?" queried Lawton.

"Draw!" said the half-breed eagerly.

"Well," said Lawton, arguing with himself, "this is a sort of a compromise. You can't reach Double Bend before sunset. That's sure. And all the big boss asks is to keep you away from there until that time. Am I right, Noony?"

"Sure," said the enthusiastic half-breed.

"Draw!" snapped Lawton, and dropped to his position.

"Two to one," said the girl, turning even paler than before. "I'll give you every chance. We draw for the first black ace. And if either of you get it, you win. Draw, Noony!"

He drew, pulling the card out with a faltering hand. It was the seven of clubs. Lawton drew the five of hearts. They leaned forward with hushed breath to watch the girl. Her hand, as usual, was tightly clutched under the neck of her shirt. She drew the deuce of diamonds, and groaned with disappointment. For the first time in the game, except at the very start, her nerve seemed to be breaking.

"Draw!" she urged.

She sat with her eyes half closed, seeing the cards as if through a mist, and her lips moved rapidly.

"What's she doin'?" whispered Noony to Lawton.

"Prayin'!" answered Lawton. "I'll be damned!"

And he drew an ace—the ace of hearts. Noony drew the king of spades. The girl rested her hand on the top of the deck, and it lay there for a long moment. It seemed to be trembling so much that she could not manage the cards.

"Draw for me," she said at last to Lawton. "I feel sort of sick."

She was a deadly white, and Lawton, after a rather worried glance at her, turned up the card. It was the ace of spades. All three sat in a stunned silence. Then Lawton rose, removed his hat, and swept the dusty floor with it in his elaborate bow.

"Lady," he said, "I've played most all over this range, but when I meet a dead-game sport I take off my hat. Take my saddle-bag to help stow the loot. Your own ain't big enough."

But she rose in turn without a word and caught up her saddle. At the door of the hut she whistled, and the white stallion, with pricking ears, trotted up to her like a dog coming at the master's call. The two men leaned in the door and with gloomy eyes watched her saddle.

But she gave them not a glance, working with feverish eagerness at the cinches. When

they were taut she leaped into the saddle, waved to them, and spurred in silence down the steep slope of the ravine. A tall boulder rose before her. The white stallion rose like a hunting horse and sailed easily over it. It buried her from view on the other side.

"By God!" said Noony, pointing back at the winnings of the girl. "She forgot it!"

But Lawton stood with his hat off and stared down the ravine.

"Forget it," he said slowly at length. "Noony, you was always mostly a fool, and you get worse the older you get. Me speakin' personal, I guess I been a fool most of my life, too. I'm going to take a longer look at the next girl I meet."

And still he would not come back into the hut, but stood bareheaded under the full blaze of the sun staring into a vacuous distance lined with wavering streaks of heat.

Into that distance the girl rode at a desperate speed, swerving back and forth among the boulders. Yet when the first rush of her eagerness had passed, she checked the stallion to a more even pace.

She knew him as a student knows a well-conned book, every page by heart. The distance to Double Bend was vague in her mind, but she gaged it as well as she could, and planned the use of the stallion's strength to fill that measured distance. There was no distant range around Double Bend by which she could test the length of her course. It was all by guess.

The rest at the shanty had freshened her horse. She felt the spring and drive of his stride swinging onward tirelessly. It seemed as if no distance and no speed could exhaust that mount. Now and then, anxiously, she turned her head and glanced at the sun as it rolled westward. It had never seemed to move so rapidly. As if it lunged down the incline of the sky toward the sunset horizon, it sped faster and faster, and at every glance upward her heart beat faster, and the sickness came in her throat.

At sunset she knew something would happen to Dix Van Dyck. What it might be she could not dream, but the very uncertainty increased her terror.

Between those sudden and fearful glances at the course of the sun she gave all her care to picking out the best possible course for the stallion. If it had been the new trail, the one which passed through Godfrey, she would have been able to ride it on a dark night, but every stone of this old trail was new to her.

She had reduced the pace of the stallion to a long, swinging gallop on the level stretches and to a sharp trot up the slighter inclines. But now and then they struck rough places, which would have winded the horse if she had not let him take them at a walk. All the time she had the burden of caring for the stallion's strength. He was not like the average cattle-pony which gages a distance and strikes a pace which it can maintain all of a day. All that the great white horse wished was freedom to take the bit between his teeth and race at full speed.

The sun rolled lower. She saw shadows growing deeper along the cañons, and rising higher and higher up the slopes—shadows of death, she thought, and she knew now why death was so often likened to the oncoming of night. Still there was no sign of the approach to Double Bend, and the sun stood still only an hour's distance above the western hills. Here she stopped the horse, dismounted, and, forcing him to raise his head, she poured the last water from her canteen down his throat.

His breathing frightened her. It came with a great gasp and wheeze, with a rattle toward the end, like the breath of a dying man.

And when she leaped into the saddle again the white stallion started ahead, not with his usual spring, but breaking into a trot before he could reach a gallop. The lilt and spring was passing from his stride. His feet struck the earth as fast and as hard as ever, but there was none of that easy resiliency which tells of a resource of power.

His ears were flattened now along his neck; his head stretched forth in a straight line from the shoulders. She knew all at once that the last strength of the gallant horse was going into his work. And now, as if to break their hearts, the ground swept up into a long, steeply rising slope. She struck her hand across her eyes and groaned.

But to the west the red sun, settling and bulging at the sides, was resting on the top

of a peak and glaring at her like a great crimson eye of hate and mockery. She had ridden a course against him, and she had been beaten. She drove the spurs home, and the stallion, with sharpening panting, swept up the slope at a staggering gallop.

His life was in every stride, but the life of Dix Van Dyck might be in them as well, so she rode cruelly, with a breaking heart, and, as the sun settled slowly, slowly behind that hill, she knew that Van Dyck was lost, and began to repeat aloud to herself, over and over again: "The cross! It is the cross!" It would bring luck to her, but never to Van Dyck.

The sun was down; the shadows swept with sudden dimness across the mountains; there was a deeper dark of hopelessness in the heart of Jacqueline. And then it was that she topped the slope and at the same time that a fresh cool breeze struck her face she saw, far below her, the faint, uncertain lights of Double Bend.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### SUSPENSE.

IT was as if the spirit of a metropolitan city had descended upon Double Bend. Men, women, and children walked down the crooked street with quick steps as though each one had a business destination, a thing hitherto unprecedented, for usually the pedestrians loitered along, resting between steps, and even the horses trotted through the streets with shambling feet and hanging heads.

Stranger still, the activity increased as evening approached. It was, indeed, as if Double Bend were that section of Broadway where the crowds of pleasure seekers begin to swarm out at a certain late hour in the day, wakening as the sun sets.

So it was with Double Bend. Every one in the town was on the streets. They gathered here and there in groups. There was a buzzing murmur like the swarming of many hives—the lowered voices of excited men. The cigarettes of the Mexicans, as the gloom of evening began, no longer hung pendent from their lips, requiring continual relighting, but now they glowed like live coals, and as the light of day diminished the fire of the cigarettes made a halo on every dark, lean face.

The Mexicans were stirred up about something. The whites could not understand, and they consulted Marshal Phil Glasgow. That worthy advised them to get inside their houses early and to keep guns handy. There might be hell to pay that night, but what was in the air he could not tell.

They followed the advice of Phil Glasgow, who was a prophet of some repute when it came to trouble. The result was that the complexion of the crowd waxed browner and browner after sunset. And then—as if at a preconcerted signal—the crowd drifted toward the center of the town.

Numerous flasks had appeared from some quarter, and now they were distributed from hand to hand. One or two more industrious drinkers were already unsteady on their feet. The majority still carried a thirst, edged like a knife. And the murmurs grew louder and louder.

A rumor sprang up out of the earth that a white man had killed a Mexican on the outskirts of Double Bend. Some loud voices called for immediate vengeance. Others quieted them with the suggestion that there was something to be done right there in the heart of the town. Other rumors went the rounds—quickly—leaping from lip to lip, and leaving a sting of poison behind. Nothing human travels faster than rumor. It seems to be breathed in with the air.

The crowd began to grow more compacted. Finally it was almost impossible to cross any of the streets opening on the little square at one end of which the jail stood. It was at this time, just as the last glow of the sunset was fading, that a woman appeared on horseback, working her way toward the jail, and leading another horse of extraordinary size. She was stopped by the thickness of the crowd, and some one swung a lantern and flashed it in her face.

There was a cry: "She is all right. The daughter of El Tigre. The man who took the gringo. Let her pass."

As if by magic the crowd melted away

before her, and she started at a walk down the square.

Almost at the same instant, at an opposite point on the square, some one recognized El Tigre. The Indian walked wrapped to the eyes in a large blanket. He strove to escape from the throng, but they stopped him, cheering. It was the first time, perhaps, in the history of the southwest that a Yaqui had been cheered by Mexicans; but to them he was the captor of Dix Van Dyck first and a Yaqui only in the second place. They slipped flasks of whisky and mescal into his hands. They bid him to supper.

He replied with grunts, and continued to work his way among them with the agility of a snake wriggling through tall grass. He also came to the open space around the jail and went directly toward it. The door was open, and deep in the hall paced the jailer, nervous and pale of face. He had been drinking to support his courage, and at sight of El Tigre he shrank back against the wall and raised his lantern for a surer view of the visitor.

The Indian held back the end of his blanket long enough to show his face, whereat the jailer lowered his lantern with a sigh of relief.

"I have come to see Señor Van Dyck," he said.

"From Onate?" asked the jailer softly.

"Yes."

"Then it's not to be the crowd? You're going to do the work and they're going to take the credit, eh?"

The Indian, who only vaguely understood this, shrugged his shoulders and grunted.

"Go ahead," said the jailer, and handed over both key and lantern, "and remember that I haven't seen you come in. That's all. Down those steps—open the door at the end, and at the foot of the second flight you find the bars of Van Dyck. Adios."

And he raised his flask to his lips with a shudder. The Indian had already veiled his face with his blanket and started down the first flight of steps to the basement. After he had opened the last door, he paused, as Dolores had done before him, and stared into the dark, scenting the light, disagreeable odor. His eyes brightened ominously as he descended that flight of steps. He raised his lantern at the foot of the stairs, and looking past the bars saw the grim face of Van Dyck. He uncovered his face again.

"It is time," said El Tigre.

"Ah," said the captive, rearing his great height behind the bars," they've sent the bloodhound again, eh?"

"The heart of El Tigre has been sick," said the Yaqui, "and he has thought of his white father. Señor Onate is a dog and the son of a dog. To him, also, El Tigre owes his life, but shall a dog receive a price? No, El Tigre has come to his white father. Outside the jail the Mexicans are gathered. They are swine, and they are hungry for Señor Van Dyck. Therefore I have come."

And he unlocked the door of the cell and opened it wide. Dix Van Dyck stepped out and stretched his arms above his head.

"A square shooter," he said. "El Tigre, your skin is yellow, but your heart's white. D'you know the way to get out of this hell-hole?"

The Indian raised his hand for silence; from the distance above them came a low mutter like the growl of a watch-dog, but even a moment's perception showed that the sound came from many human throats.

"That is bad," said El Tigre simply.

"It is," nodded Dix Van Dyck. "I've heard it before. The greasers have been drinking, El Tigre?"

"It is true."

"And now they're going to rush the jail and get me?"

"It is true. And they would lead you from the town and build a fire of mesquite in the hills and burn you—slowly."

Van Dyck shuddered violently and then a fire burned up in his eye. His captivity had increased his gauntness but had hardly weakened him, and now with his unshaven face and his hollow, lighted eye, he might have stood for the picture of a gigantic madman, a Titan ready to wage war against Jove.

"They're waitin' for us, El Tigre," he said. "Let's go to meet 'em. I'm hungry, El Tigre. I haven't eaten for a month."

The face of the Indian lighted with a smile of infinite grimness.

"El Tigre also," he said, in his smooth Spanish, "has many debts to pay to the Mexicans. He thinks that the time has come. But we must have teeth before we can fight."

He threw down his blanket and exposed, around his waist, two belts, each with two revolvers suspended from the holsters. One of these he offered to Van Dyck, who buckled it about him instantly.

"And now?" said El Tigre softly.

"Wait," answered the white man. "I'd rather be with a man I don't know than a gun I've never fingered."

He whipped out the revolvers and balanced them in either hand. Then he spun the cylinders—pushed them open—glanced at the action.

"They fit my hand like they was made to order," he announced as he shoved them back into the holsters. "Hark to 'em roaring, El Tigre! The dogs! They don't dream we're coming to feed 'em fat in another way than they think."

He stopped with his foot on the stair.

"But you can't go with me, El Tigre. Start out first and get safe from the jail. Then I'll follow you. This ain't your battle. You've done your share giving me a fighting chance."

"My white father forgets," said El Tigre. "He gave me my life even when his hands were empty. His honor could not be bought even by freedom. El Tigre, too, has a strong heart. And he has a price to pay. He will fight at the side of his white brother. It is well."

"You hear me talk," said Van Dyck, with profound emotion. "El Tigre, when we get past this mess we'll team it together. And for a pal you'll find me straight. Gimme your hand!"

The hand of the Indian closed hard over his.

"It is true," said El Tigre, "the spirit of El Tigre will follow his white father, but his body shall lie on the street of Double Bend to-night trampled by many feet, with blood on his mouth."

"By God!" said Van Dyck. "It ain't possible!"

"It is true," said the Indian. "It shall be my last fight."

"You're thinking on a cold trail," said the white man. "Buck up, El Tigre. We'll go through the greasers like a hot knife through butter. They can't stand close work, and I know how to play 'em. Die? Man, you'll live to a hundred."

"No," said the Indian, "there is no heart in El Tigre for living. Those he has loved have turned from him again. Those he would have kept as clean as the white snow have fallen in mud and grown black. He has lived alone, but he has lived long enough; he has found a man; he has found a white father!"

He stiffened and his head went back; delirium lighted his eyes.

"He has been a lone wolf. He has gone where no men have gone. He has been the tiger in the night. He has come without noise and killed, and without noise he has departed. Nothing has loved him, but there is nothing that has not feared him. El Tigre would rather be feared than loved. He is the tiger in the night. He is the lone wolf who hunts without giving voice on the trail. He will die with his teeth in the throat of his enemy. The great spirit shall lean from the clouds to welcome El Tigre when he dies. It is true. El Tigre has spoken."

He pointed above him with a stiff finger.

"The dog pack howls. White father, let us go to them."

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### EL TIGRE PAYS ALL DEBTS.

THEY passed quickly through the basement and up the stairs to the main floor of the jail. At the entrance to the corridor at the end of which the gate of the jail stood—wide to the night—El Tigre touched the shoulder of his companion.

"The jailer," he said, "sits in a chair down the hall. He is waiting for the dog-pack. El Tigre will go to him and whisper in his ear."

"If El Tigre should miss his spring his white father must know that the daughter of El Tigre sits on a horse at the side of

the square, to the left from the door. She holds also another horse, very tall. It is the horse of Señor Van Dyck."

"Good," nodded the white man, and El Tigre stepped out into the hall and walked with a swift step down toward the jailer.

Outside, by a strange freak of chance, some of the Mexican mob had raised the strains of their song: *La Paloma—The Dove.* Others took it up; soon the song was ringing from scores of throats. The occasion seemed to have become one of national spirit for the greasers.

The jailer in the hall, waiting with beating heart for the coming of the mob, had so far fortified himself against the crisis, that he was now past the stage of any fear. He raised his flask to his lips again and then leaned back in his chair, singing in time with the crowd outside and beating the rhythm with his half-empty flask.

As El Tigre reached him the song outside swept toward the close and even before it came to an end a single voice yelled shrilly. It was like the whoop of an Indian, and was answered by a dull roar of rage; a patter of feet began, and the jailer sprang up. He started back at the sight of El Tigre.

"For God's sake, they are coming!" he cried. "Protect me, El Tigre."

"It is true," said the Indian. "El Tigre is thirsty."

He took the flask from the hand of the unfortunate jailer, raised it toward his lips, and then completed the movement by swinging it sharply to the right. It struck the head of the jailer, crashed in a thousand pieces, and after he had stared a stupid second at the tall form of the Indian the Mexican sank in a formless heap on the floor. At the same instant the night beyond the open door was black with faces—black, for every man wore a mask.

"Now!" cried El Tigre, and Dix Van Dyck leaped into the hall.

First to enter the hall, and leaders of the mob, were the tall form of Garcia and a stocky man beside him. They carried rifles. As for those behind the leaders, the majority brought no weapons whatever. The word had been passed by Garcia that weapons were not wanted at this festival. All that was needed would be numbers to conceal identity, for a hundred men might do safely what six would never risk.

Moreover, if many were armed there would be great chances that one of them would send a bullet into the captive before he could be taken to the fire.

For these and others reasons Garcia had issued his suggestion about arms, and the majority had followed his order. They had expected a helpless captive; instead, they saw the most feared man on the range before them, armed to the teeth.

Yet they were courageous men, and quick with their weapons. In spite of the unnerving surprise they jerked their weapons to their shoulder and fired. But both were wild, and Van Dyck, standing tall and confident with the courage of the desperado who dares not miss, fired twice in return.

Garcia sank to the floor without a word, but his squat, broad-shouldered companions, tore at his face with both hands and staggered back through the open door, screaming horribly. He had been shot through the mouth.

Moreover, his fall blocked the way of those behind, and threw the leaders into confusion. They had not dreamed of resistance; actually to encounter it deprived them of their wits in the crisis.

Before they could recover the Indian was at the door. He leaped low—among their very legs—and dropping his revolver he swung his heavy knife and buried it to the hilt again and again.

Shrieks answered him, shrieks, and the beginning of a panic. Those behind halted, dumfounded at the check; those in front swirled back with the picture of red death before them.

Before they could recover the bull-like bellow of Dix Van Dyck ran on them, like thunder, and the big man leaped through the door into their midst, a gun barking in each hand. Firing into that compacted swarm the bullets could not miss. They ploughed their way through solid walls of flesh.

The shrieking rose to a ghastly crescendo. Those in front turned their backs on the horror in mad terror and fought to dive into the safety of the mob; they made a

barrier or flesh through which it was impossible for those behind to fire effectively at Van Dyck or the Indian. They began to brandish knives and revolvers over their heads—the few that had them—and shots were fired wildly in the air.

Van Dyck loaded his guns again and emptied them a second time. Then he sprang like a Norseman gone berserk with fighting madness on the backs of the fugitives. He caught his revolvers by the barrels and with these heavy clubs in his strong hands every blow, nearly, brought down a man.

Not that they all fled blindly. There were brave men in that crowd, though all were at first unnerved by the unexpected attack. Here and there men began to turn —fire—or raise a knife. But they met either the bullet of Van Dyck or the deadly steel of the Indian.

For El Tigre was drunk with delight. He leaped here and there like a leaf jerked about by a crazy wind that blows from all directions, and wherever he leaped he struck, and wherever he struck he yelled in a way that curdled the blood and rose over the confused raging of the crowd.

A deadly fighter, but mild indeed, compared with the raging of the gigantic white man. He fought with his lips writhed back from set teeth, and through those set teeth he laughed continually—a strange, ghastly sound. He broke the barrel of one gun, and then he threw them both aside and fought with his bare fists—weapons scarcely less terrible, for though they might not kill, they drove out with the force of pistons and where they struck men groaned and fell.

It was one of these who had fallen who recovered his senses almost at once and raising himself on his belly with his hands saw the two destroyers raging on the heels of the crowd which gave back in a rapidly widening semicircle.

A thousand strange deeds had been performed, and yet the entire fight had covered only a small space of seconds. He saw them fleeing, struggling to get away from the nameless danger behind them.

And the little man noted that there were only two who drove so many. He noted that, and it gave him courage; also, his throat was burning with a recent draught of mescal.

So he drew a long-bladed jack-knife, and running low, like a four-footed animal, came behind El Tigre in the midst of his work, leaped into the air, and smote the Indian in the middle of the back to the full length of his blade. The Indian turned and struck at his assailant, but the knife dropped from his hand. He coughed blood and fell forward on his face.

That was the turning point of the battle. The vast majority were fleeing; there remained only the armed men who had the courage to fight. And these now turned their faces and rushed at Dix Van Dyck. A dozen shots whirred past him: but his thought was first for vengeance for El Tigre. It was not long in coming.

The little man who had struck the blow came again and leaped once more into the air, like a cat. In the midst of his leap the piston-rod arm of Van Dyck plunged out and met him in the face. The blow smashed his nose and gashed his cheek; he went back as though recoiling from a spring, and landed, head-first, on the ground.

A fury was on Van Dyck — a frenzy which trebled his enormous natural strength. For he caught up the fallen man by the heels, whirled him high over his head, and cast him into the faces of his foes. It checked them; it sent their shots wild; but the life of Van Dyck was limited by a matter of seconds only when something like Providence struck for him.

It was Dolores. At first she saw only a confused mass of struggling figures as the two men plunged out of the jail and met their assailants. When the semicircle nearest the door cleared, and she watched the terrible fighting of her father and the big white man. A grim thing, but glorious to the wild heart of Dolores. She had stood in her stirrups and yelled her delight.

And now she saw the crowd surge back against the two men; saw her father struck down from behind; saw Van Dyck smite down the slayer and then cast the senseless body in the faces of the crowd.

At that deed her blood drove from her heart to her brain. She swung the head of

her horse about, looped the reins of the great charger of Dix Van Dyck over the pommel of her saddle, and driving the rowels of her spurs deep into the flanks of her own tall horse, galloped against the fighters. She caught her own rein over the crook of her arm, snatched out the two revolvers and fired blindly to left and right, yelling at the top of her shrill voice.

It was too much for the courage of the crowd. Already they saw the ground before them littered with the bodies of dead, wounded, and stunned men; there were some among them who had already felt the knife of El Tigre or the fist of Dix Van Dyck. And at this sudden onslaught from the side they raised a shout of dismay and split before the coming of Dolores like water before the prow of a ship.

Into the mass she drove. Her horse, rearing, struck out in a panic of terror, and men went down before those ponderous, armed hoofs. She felt the horse reel and stagger as his hoofs sank in something horribly soft—and then there stood before only the bloody figure of Dix Van Dyck.

The tearing hands of a hundred men had torn his shirt from his back. He stood naked to the waist, splashed with crimson, his hands red as a butcher where he had taken a wounded man by the throat.

He gave her a yell of welcome and without touching the pommel, leaped into his saddle and caught his rein from Dolores.

"Now!" he cried. "Now, now!"

There were new guns in the holsters of his saddle; Dolores had seen to that. And with the yelling Indian girl at his side he galloped straight through the crowd, firing to right and left among the last of the panic-stricken fugitives. Men melted away before them; the road stretched suddenly bare and blank; they thundered away into the thick heart of the night.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE COMING OF JACK.

THE white stallion, at a reeling gallop, swung down the last long slope toward Double Bend. It was pitch-dark now and the horse was too exhausted to pick his footing by any instinct. Twice he stepped on a loose stone and nearly fell. And at last, with hanging head, at a shambling trot, he struck into the main street of Double Bend.

She had expected voices, noise, crowds. It was the time for the dance-hall to be in full blast, but when she passed it she found closed doors and blank darkness.

Something had happened; and she knew in her heart that it had something to do with Dix Van Dyck. But there was not a soul on the streets. The lights were out in every house; she could not hear the stirring of a step, not a voice, not a single burst of laughter. And yet this was Double Bend!

It was ghostly. She thought of some breath of pestilence which might have struck across the place. Certainly everything was as still as death. And it was then that she caught the glimmer of light from the office of Marshal Phil Glasgow.

She had rather have seen it in any other place. She spurred the stallion to a staggering gallop, pitilessly. As she drew closer she saw a huddle of horses in front of the office and men passing in, so she swung from the saddle and ran through the door.

Inside were a dozen men—all whites, and at a table before them Marshal Phil Glasgow was reading to them. Every man stood with raised hand. They were taking the oath; a posse was being formed.

It froze her heart. She knew the meaning well enough. A lawless mob had seized Dix Van Dyck and killed him. Now the marshal was forming a posse to follow the perpetrators of the crime. That was why Double Bend was plunged in darkness. The reading of the oath ended; the men answered as one in a deep-voiced chorus: "I do!"

It was then that Phil Glasgow looked up and saw the white face of the girl at the door.

"What the hell!" said Glasgow. "How'd you come here?"

"Dix," she said faintly, "Dix Van Dyck. They've killed him?"

"Have they?" growled the marshal. "Not that I know of."

"Thank God," she breathed, and could

do nothing but repeat it for a moment, over and over.

She said at last; light breaking on her: "This posse is to follow *him*—follow Van Dyck?"

"Maybe," said the sullen marshal.

"Send 'em home," said the girl. "There ain't no call for a posse. The governor has pardoned Dix Van Dyck. I got it here."

She placed the pardon on the table before him.

It would have been hard to tell whether it was disappointment or relief which showed most plainly in the face of Phil Glasgow.

"It's the old man's signature," he said, "and it reads like his lingo. Yep, it's straight stuff. Boys, you hunt your bunks. Thanks for turning out for me."

But they lingered, swearing; it was their way of expressing all emotions. And they stared at Jacqueline, who had slipped exhausted into a chair.

"What's happened?" she asked.

"I'll tell you that," said one of the men, "the prettiest little fight that was ever staged on the range, Jack. The Mex started for the jail. They went on a gang—damn 'f I know how many there was in it. Old El Tigre went before 'em and turned Dix Van Dyck loose and give him guns.

"About the time the crowd hit the jail Dix and El Tigre come out, Dix with his guns spittin' and El Tigre with a knife. Nacherally they was a heap of an argument between them two and the crowd. The greasers had numbers, but them two had the fighting heart.

"Finally El Tigre was knifed between the shoulders, and it looked black for Van Dyck, when little Dolores charged into the gang with two horses and got Van Dyck, aboard one of 'em. Then they beat it off.

"They left the ground considerable littered up. We picked up seven dead men, not counting El Tigre, and a dozen others hurt too bad to crawl away, besides the Lord knows how many that was able to run off.

"Jack, it looked like the floor of a slaughter-house. And from now on the greasers are going to step soft and talk soft around Double Bend. You couldn't raise a crowd of Mex to-night with a barrel of free booze. Speaking personal, I'm glad Van Dyck got away. He showed like a man to-night."

"You talk like a fool," said the marshal. "They ain't nothing you can hold against Dix Van Dyck right now. He was tackled by the crowd, and all he done to-night was self-defense. But it's only days now before he'll get at the trail of old Onate."

"Is Onate behind it?" asked some one.

"Are ye blind?" queried Glasgow fiercely. "Can't you see the hand of the greaser behind all this? Who else could raise this crowd in Double Bend? Besides, he come in here an hour ago wiith the fear of God on him. He demanded the protection of my men. Think of that! A sheriff asking for protection!

"I asked him what he feared, and he told me that during the fight Dix Van Dyck had made threats against him. I laughed at him and told him if that was the case he'd better order his coffin.

"But it wasn't any laughin' matter with old Onate. He went off sick and yellow-faced, the dog! I hear he's called in a bunch of greasers and is payin' 'em to guard his house.

"No, lads, it's only a question of days before we're on the trail of Van Dyck again. He's coming for the hide of Onate. I don't wish him no bad luck, but if he drops the sheriff I've got to go after him, and there ain't no man that's got away from me yet after I once started on his trail."

"What'll you do?" asked one of the men.

"Sit here and wait," said the marshal. "Double Bend is our trap; Onate is our bait. Just takes time, but in the end we're sure to get Dix Van Dyck. Only it'll be a man-sized job to take him after he's cornered. Jack, you're his friend, ain't you?"

"I am," she answered.

"Then if you can run across him, tell him to lay off Onate. It ain't healthy."

"Glasgow," she said scornfully, "d'you really think there's a ghost of a show of getting Dix Van Dyck off a trail he's once started?"

He leaned across the table and stared at her.

"Jack," he said, I got an idea it'd be to your interest to get him off this here trail of Onate."

She jumped from her chair and stood with flushed face, glaring at him.

"What d'you mean, Glasgow?"

"I dunno," said the marshal, and grinned not unkindly at her, "but just think it over. If he's worth saving, Jack, you got to keep him away from the sheriff."

She turned slowly away. She was not thinking of the marshal's words, but she was seeing again in her mind's eye the careless, boyish recklessness of Van Dyck as she had first watched him in the dance-hall; how long ago it seemed!

The heart of a boy and the heavy hand of a strong man! The two did not go safely together. She tried to define him; he was simply a grown-up mischief-maker. And then the advice of the marshal struck home in her mind. She could have blessed him for it. She knew that Dix Van Dyck had followed through the mountains on a long trail. Perhaps for her sake he would give up his vengeance on Onate.

After all, it was only a dim hope, for she remembered how he had sat at their table in the dance-hall and actually waited for the pursuit to overtake him—waited in the hope and joyous expectation of a fight; waited because he challenged the bad luck of the cross which she wore.

She remembered how his agile hand had suddenly poised on the edge of the table and his eyes fixed and burned past her so that she had known that the enemy was in the room. Then the down swoop of that hand, the flash of the revolver, the boom of the shot; and how the Mexican had staggered back with his hands across his face. It was terribly clear to her.

And terribly clear were the misfortunes which the cross had brought upon him. First the outlawry. She had broken that, but now he was a known man, and at the first suspicion, things would go hard with him at the hands of the officers of the law.

And now the bad luck led him on toward Onate. He was sure to strike at the Mexican; he was sure to succeed; and afterward there would be the inevitable outlawry again, and this time the pursuit which must end in the death of Van Dyck. Once he had escaped; it would be impossible to do so twice.

In the sense of helplessness which overwhelmed her she caught her hand to the base of her throat to seize the little metal cross and throw it away from her, anywhere, into the night.

But at her touch the cross pressed cold against her flesh and she remembered a thousand things. It had betrayed others, perhaps, but to her the cross had been a continual salvation. It was wealth and strength to her; and it carried with it a host of associations. She felt that she would never have the strength to give it up, even for Van Dyck. But here her thoughts paused, suddenly.

It was necessary first of all to reach Van Dyck and tell him first of the pardon and then of the necessity of keeping from the trail of Onate. She waited until after midnight, to let the stallion rest. Then she started slowly on the trail for Guadalupe, keeping well to the right of the beaten track and among the hills. For she knew that Van Dyck would head toward Guadalupe to reach Onate.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ONATE'S INSPIRATION.

SEÑOR DON PORFIRIO MARIA ONATE could neither sit nor stand in comfort. He could not walk without crossing a doorway, and every time he crossed a doorway there came over him a shuddering thought that the door might open and a giant spring out upon him. A giant such as his trembling friends had described to him, unkempt, unshaven, lean, hollow-eyed, swift, and terrible—with hands that crushed throats with a single grip and steel-faced fists that broke heads—seemed too frightful to contemplate.

Señor Onate caressed his neck with his pudgy hands. He retired from the vicinity of the yawning doorway and sought refuge in the corner of his room.

But here, with wall on two sides, it occurred to him that his own flight would be barred in case the foe should enter the room. He moved hastily to the center of the apartment and stood casting fearful glances on all sides.

He was not an exceedingly timorous man, to be sure, but recent events had shattered his nerves. He was prepared for anything except failure. His plans had been so well laid that it was more than improbable that they would fail—it was impossible.

That was what broke his spirit. The impossible had occurred. Here, only a few hours ago, the great enemy had lain helpless and hopeless in the jail. A mob was gathering to crush him. And now he was free, loose in the hills, armed, and ready for vengeance.

Thank God that for money, guards may be hired! Onate dropped back into his chair and sighed with sick-hearted relief when he remembered the stanch fighters whom he had employed. They patrolled his garden up and down in every direction. They were posted at the four doors.

But suddenly Señor Onate leaped from the chair again. Fear had spurred him once more. It occurred to him that though all these men had come highly recommended for fighting qualities, many of them were unknown to him personally. It might be that a few gold-pieces dropped in their hands would undo all his prearranged precautions.

After all, was it not simple? A man approached them softly in the dark and said to one of the sentinels; "Turn your back but an instant, my friend; here is money to help you turn." What Mexican could resist that temptation?

Onate stole from his room and crept along the hall to the main opening which passed in a vaulted hall from the patio to the front of the house. Once in this passage, fears and whispers and the light-touching winds of the night beset him.

He crouched in the throat of the black arch and peered forth into the night. There in the garden he peered cautiously.

But he saw nothing. A pang of horror and cold rage beset him. Had the dogs already betrayed him and left their posts? Were they even then, perhaps, stealing upon him?

But at the very moment when he was about to turn and fly back to the house he perceived a shadow moving close to the dawn. Then another, another, another. Four men walked their posts in the garden. He was safe, safe, safe! The sensation of relief was so great that a sob rose in his throat and tears trickled, one after another, down his face.

He went back into the house almost boldly, but when a door was snatched by the wind and loudly banged, he started and whirled in a fresh panic. At this point he discovered that he was very thirsty and called aloud: "Dolores! Ho, there, Dolores!"

It was not till his anger began to rise at her delay that he remembered that she had left him; that she was gone to the side of his great enemy. She had found the white man with the cruel, straight-lipped mouth and she had followed him as she had threatened.

It left a sense of bitter emptiness in Onate. Moreover, it gave a new edge to his fear. For the girl knew him like a book. She knew all his tastes, all his weaknesses. She could read his mind. If she combined her brain with that of Dix Van Dyck nothing between heaven and hell could keep him from falling before their combined attack.

"I hope he will beat her!" groaned Onate. "Beat her till the blood flows down over her beautiful face; beat her till welts rise on her back; kick her in the mouth—so!"

He struck at the air in his wild fury. Then he remembered that such a man as Dix Van Dyck would never lay the weight of a finger on a woman. He remembered that for the sake of a woman Dix Van Dyck had allowed himself to be led, unresisting, into captivity.

This strange truth still further disarmed Onate. It was another miracle attributable to Van Dyck. What we do not understand we all fear. A child fears the night; Onate feared Dix Van Dyck. If the man had been a plain scoundrel he would have understood a little; he would not have felt so helpless.

As it was, he was about to engage in a death struggle with an unknown power.

He could not tell whether the white man would hire other men to fight his battle with him or make the attack alone. He did not know whether to look for many or for one. He did not know whether the stroke would come stealthily in the middle of night, with the silence of a crawling snake, or whether it would come in the middle of day, with terrible boldness, when the bright sunlight wrapped him in a sense of false security.

The brain of Onate reeled, and in his despair he reached automatically for his favorite flask of tequila and poured himself a stiff drink. The liquid fire warmed his throat, and at least took some of the chill from his heart. It became possible for him to think.

Thoughts sprang full-grown into the brain of Onate. It was, indeed, the secret source of his power. He never had to fumble about in the dark, as many other men did. When a difficulty confronted him he generally saw straight into the heart of the matter and knew instantly when and where to strike.

It happened now that he cast about in his mind to think what man would be sure to follow Dix Van Dyck in this war, and the first name that came to his lips was that of Joseph Van Dyck, the young brother, in far south Guadalupe.

First Onate thought of him as a power to harm, and remembered a tall youth of seventeen, rather darkly handsome, and with gentle eyes far different from the cold glare of Dix Van Dyck.

The elder brother was an anomaly even to his family. He was a throw-back toward the primitive, an atavism. Joseph Van Dyck followed the natural course of family blood. He made up in his gentleness for the grim ferocity and tiger-hearted playfulness of his brother. Of him Onate thought as a menace, but the thought of Joseph Van Dyck ever raising a hand to fight except in the most desperate case of self-defense was amusing; it was absurd. Not a danger, then.

Not a help to Dix Van Dyck? Then came the rapier thrust of inspiration. Not a help to Dix Van Dyck, but a terrible and compromising weakness. To reach the terrible elder brother was not in the power of the sheriff in spite of his men, and he knew it. He could not have purchased the services of Mexicans to follow the trail of this redoubtable man-slayer.

But the younger brother? There passed a trail of vague thoughts through the mind of Onate—rumors he had heard in Guadalupe concerning a great love and tenderness which lay between the two brothers in spite of the differences between their natures. The rumors ran on to tell how the hard hand of Dix Van Dyck had warded the danger of the world from the shoulders of his young brother.

There were a score of anecdotes which flashed now across the mind of Señor Onate, and now, in the full flush of his inspiration he leaped to his feet and shouted aloud, again, again, and again.

Manuel and Pedro at the same instant showed their dark faces at the door.

Their master redoubled his laughter and jovially hurled a stool at their heads.

"I am safe," cried Onate, and collapsed into his chair, "I am safe, Manuel, Pedro, good boys, worthy lads. Bring me yonder flask. God is on my side. But wait! First go to the telephone and get my deputy at Guadalupe on the wire. Quick! Let everything wait for that!"

They disappeared, and until his call came in he sat in his chair, alternately shivering violently, like one seized with a palsy, and then laughing inordinately and rolling his fat body about in the chair.

When his time came the voice of José Remoso answered him on the end of the wire.

"José," called the sheriff sharply, "Señor Van Dyck is escaped from the jail; his pardon will be here at once from the governor. I am in danger."

In his astonishment the deputy swore; he had no other answer.

"I must be protected," went on the sheriff, "against this devil. José Remoso, my friend, there are still members of Van Dyck's family in Guadalupe."

"It is true," said the deputy.

"Do you see?"

"See what, señor?"

"You are a fool. Are there not brigands who kidnap men and children and hold them for ransom?"

"That also is true, señor."

"And still you do not see?"

"Nothing, señor."

"If Joseph Van Dyck disappears will it not seem that some brigand, some outlaw has seized him?"

"It is true, also."

"Blockhead, if the boy is in my power I have nothing to fear from his brother—his devil of a fire-eating brother, Dix Van Dyck. Let the boy disappear. Then I send word to Dix Van Dyck that if a hair of my head is injured the boy will answer for it to my friends."

"Señor, the thought must have come to you from heaven."

"From heaven indeed, Remoso. Let it be done at once."

"At once, señor. But how did the man break from the jail?"

"The treacherous dog, El Tigre—and then the two fought like demons and killed many men. Adios, Remoso. Strike quickly in Guadalupe."

So saying, he hung up the receiver and went back to his chair. The terror was passing, leaving him only weak and weary from the long hysteria. Comfort was coming, and with its coming a great thirst. He drank again and again until his brain hummed. Out of the humming grew a sound, and the sound after a time took on the semblance of a human voice. It was extremely odd.

The drink, the sharp reaction, had thrown him into a sort of a delirium. He was conscious of a fever and a lightness of head for which the drink could only be partially responsible. And in the meantime that faintly singing voice chanted in his head.

He canted his ear to it and listened with a frown. And at last he made out that it was his own thought which kept repeating in his own voice, over and over: "Dolores! Dolores mia! Devil Dolores! Dolores, my beautiful!"

The sheriff fell back helplessly in his chair.

"She has come to haunt me," he groaned, "and I shall not sleep to-night!"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE WHITE HORSE.

AS for Dolores, certainly she was never further from thoughts of Señor Don Porfirio Maria Onate. She sat at this very time staring with her great black eyes across the sullen red embers of the camp-fire toward Dix Van Dyck.

It was something past midnight, but they had only traveled as far as a convenient spring in the hollow of the hills, a little to the right of the main trail which led down toward Guadalupe. By the side of this spring they built their fire and screened it by rolling big rocks on all sides of the flame.

Then, after they had cooked and eaten, Dix Van Dyck threw off his clothes and she saw the faint white glimmer of his body in the distance while he bathed and shaved in the cold water which trickled down from the spring. She marvelled with her childish mind at the dexterity of a man who could handle deadly steel and shave himself in the dark.

She marvelled still more when he came back beside the fire. With the unkempt growth of beard and the red marks of the battle gone, his face seemed singularly pale for one who had lived all his life in the open. The leanness of that face had now become almost cadaverous, and suggestive of many things.

It seemed to Dolores, as he sat there with one of her dead father's blankets wrapped around his bare shoulders, that two men sat there confronting her in one form.

For when he sat with eyes lowered and staring at the flicker of the fire, she was conscious of the man's great weariness. He was tired, it seemed, body and soul. The thin face seemed thoughtful, sad. There was a suggestion that the straight set of the mouth inferred a repression and endurance of pain.

It seemed the face of one who had borne through many bitter trials; whose trust in men and women had been burned away by hardship; who had fought the world and

conquered it but found no value in his conquest.

True, all these things did not come in sharp, clear words into the mind of Dolores, half child and half woman. But the feeling was there.

Yet when the eyelids of the outlaw raised and she saw the unendurable keenness of the eyes her own glance wavered and fell away. No matter what his body might be, his spirit was more terrible and unrelenting than ever. That set that fire in the eyes which made his glance something to be felt and shrunk from like the touch of a hot hand or like the drop of an acid.

And she understood, even more perfectly than when she had seen the big man in action against the crowd why Señor Onate had dreaded him like an incarnation of the devil. She, also, dreaded him fully as much, and yet the thrill of that terror was pleasant to the fierce Yaqui.

"Señor," she ventured timidly at length.

He turned his head silently toward her and waited.

"Señorita? he queried.

"No. I am only Dolores," she answered.

"Dolores," he repeated, and almost smiled at her.

"You are thinking much and very quickly?" she suggested.

"No," said Dix Van Dyck, "I'm seeing the face of a man, Dolores, more clearly than I see yours."

"Onate," she nodded.

"Onate."

His voice fell dry and hard on the name.

"That is why you take the road to Guadalupe?"

"Yes."

"But Onate will turn back to Double Bend."

"How?"

"He stayed near the town," she answered, "to see the burning of the white father from a distance. And when he knows that Señor Van Dyck escaped he will be taken with a great fear. Yes, he will be afraid to leave Double Bend and he will sit in his room surrounded by many men."

She broke into her rare laughter and hugged her knees in an ecstasy of childish, fierce delight.

"He will pay many men money. He will set them about his garden and his house, and he will wait, shivering, for the coming of Señor Van Dyck. Pah, the dog!"

"The dog!" echoed Van Dyck. "You are sure, Dolores, that he will not try to go to Guadalupe?"

"It is true," she said. "To-night he would rather take the road to hell than the trail to Guadalupe. No, he will sit in his house and drink tequila, and for all that he will be cold in his heart. I, Dolores, can see him shiver. Pah! I, a woman, have made him tremble till his knees knocked together."

"Aye," said the man curiously. "You are the daughter of El Tigre. And I think, Dolores, that you have teeth and claws. I watched you coming through that crowd of greasers. By heaven, that was a man's work! And I could see your eyes flash as clearly as I could see the fire of your guns. How did you have the heart for a job like that, Dolores?"

"It was not hard," she said simply. "It was for my white father. I was riding to you, señor."

"And why did you come, Dolores? Why did you come to the jail and give me the knife? Was it all because I had helped El Tigre?"

"It is true," she said.

"Dolores, you lie to me."

"Ah," said the girl, delighted again," the white father sees to the heart of his daughter. It is true. I came because I had heard a strange story."

"So?"

"Yes. I had heard a story that Señor Van Dyck gave himself to his enemies for the sake of a woman. I knew it was a lie, but still I came to look. It was a great lie, was it not, señor?"

"Humph," grunted Dix Van Dyck, and he grinned broadly at the girl. "Is this to get a yarn out of me, Dolores?"

"It is true," she said frankly. "Dolores is hungry to learn. She is hungry for wisdom."

"Well," said Dix Van Dyck," the story sounds queer, but it's straight."

She merely gaped at him, and then the smile dawned, the smile of bright wonder.

"Tell!" she cried eagerly.

"About the girl?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Why," said the man, "she was about your height, Dolores, and beautiful as the devil."

"Ha!" said the Yaqui. "A beautiful woman makes great fools of men."

"Come to think of it," smiled Dix Van Dyck, "you're a bit good to look at yourself, Dolores."

"I?" she said, with well-imitated surprise, "Alas señor, I am a piece of 'dobe made into the shape of a woman, and clothed in moldy rags. No man will look at me!"

But her eyes glinted. The white man, however, would carry the banter no further.

"It wasn't her good looks, though, Dolores," he said, "which made me follow her."

"Ah?"

"She had a cross of iron that she wears around her neck. Now, I ain't superstitious, Dolores, but I got an idea that cross can do what people claim it can do. It brings good luck to Jack Boone, and bad luck to everyone near her—everyone she likes, particularly. You see, Dolores, the cross has been tried out a lot of times, and it never fails. She always wins gambling, for instance, and she generally gets what she wants. In every way.

"But the people that go with her generally get their necks broke some time or other. There've been plenty of cases of that. She ain't been long in Double Bend, you see, but already two men have kicked off unexpected, sort of, just because they hung around Jack.

Well, Dolores, I come to Double Bend while I was making a hurry trip north to get away from Onate, who's sheriff of this county, you know. And in the dance-hall I seen Jack Boone and I heard the story about the cross. Dolores, the minute I heard that yarn—"

"You wanted to be with Señorita Jack?"

"How could you know?"

"A child," said the Indian girl, "will always do the one thing he is told he must not do."

"Humph," grunted Dix Van Dyck, "I'm a good deal of a child, eh, Dolores? Well, let that go. Anyway, I had to stick with Jack. And I did it; and I got to like her a pile more'n I'd ever liked any other woman, so when the pinch came, and I couldn't fight for my life except by throwing Jack to El Tigre and his hunting pack, I knuckled down for the sake of the girl."

He was black with the reminiscence.

The Yaqui waited, wisely.

"And maybe," said the man, "it was a fool thing I done, because she left me in the hole and never come near me while I was in the jail. She got away with her skin safe and forgot plumb all about me, Dolores."

"I," said the Yaqui sternly, "would ride first on her trail and take her by the hair, so! And beat her till the blood ran red and until she screamed and begged for pity. That is what Dolores would do."

"Would you?" queried the man curiously. "And sometimes I got a hunch that the heavy hand is what women needs, Dolores, but I ain't ever had the heart to use it."

"You have never struck a woman?" she asked eagerly.

"Me?" he asked, grimly. "Tell me what man ever said I did and I'll take him and skin him, Dolores, and tan his hide for a saddle."

"Onate is a great liar," she mused gently.

"Onate again? Still spreading filthy talk about me, eh? Well, the longer the score the quicker the settling. But when I take him I wish I had the heart to kill him slow, the way he needs."

"You will not need," said the girl. "Give him to me. I will kill him, and you need not see—or hear."

"You hate him, Dolores?"

"Ah!" she said, and fingered the knife at her girdle.

"Why?"

"Why? Truly, señor, Dolores cannot tell. Except that he is fat, and that he has been on the trail of the white father."

"You're a gentle thing, Dolores," grinned the big man, "a regular little pet lamb, you are. I'd rather meet a wild cat bare-handed than have to mix with you, my girl."

"It is true," she assented sadly, "I am

not like your woman, Jack. I am not gentle and soft."

"Gentle? Soft?" laughed Dix Van Dyck. "Dolores, that girl can ride any wild mustang on the range She can fan a gun from the hip as good as I can—or better. She can throw a knife like El Tigre. And there's no wear-out to her. She can ride that white hoss of hers all day and all night. I know, because I've tried to catch her. Tried for days."

"And she was swifter than you? Than you? asked the astonished girl.

"A whole pile," he answered emphatically. "But let's forget her."

"It is good," said Dolores with much relish. "She was a coward. She did not stay with the white father when he fell in the trap for her sake. She is a devil, not a woman. And Señor Van Dyck hates her. It is very good. The heart of Dolores is warm!"

But he pondered this question a moment seriously.

"Hate her?" he answered at length. "I can't say that I do, Dolores. No, I got no reason to like her, and a lot to dislike her, but somehow I can't get rid of the thought of her, and I can't say that it's hate that keeps me thinkin' of her. You know how some gents like whisky? They can't get rid of the taste of it? Well, that's the way the thought of this Jack follows me, Dolores."

"So?" said the girl gloomily.

"That's straight. D'you know, after I'm through with Onate I s'pose I'll make a dead line for Jack and try to get on her trail."

The Yaqui drew her knife in a silent fury and drove it to the hilt in the dead stump on which she sat.

"That is fool's talk!" she said furiously.

"Ain't it?" said the whimsical Van Dyck. "But it's straight talk, too."

Her glanced narrowed, piercing the gloom of the cañon.

"And this girl, she rides a white horse, señor?"

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing."

But far away, through the gloom, she had seen the glint of a moving object. It must have been white to show so plainly at so great a distance.

**(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)**

# Above Ground

by Roy W. Hinds

I.

MAXON, at the door, turned for a final sweeping look over the one-room hut before he departed. There were no signs of a struggle. The scanty and decrepit furniture, though not set in order by any means, betrayed nothing of the thing that had just been done there. The few tattered rugs on the floor were no more disorderly than they always had been. A few old books and newspapers lay on the table beside the door, on which also reposed the dingy kerosene lamp which shed its feeble glow over the scene. Cooking things were in their places near the stove. Articles of clothing lay or hung in their accustomed places.

The body lay on the rude bed. He had smoothed the bedclothing very carefully. He had pulled the legs out straight and stretched the arms down at the sides. There was no bruise, nor even a discoloration, on the throat. His fingers had been bandaged with pads of absorbent cotton, and he had accomplished his task carefully. He had hovered over the bits of cotton afterward until they had turned to ash in the stove.

The only disquieting things about the body were the jaw, which sagged loosely, and the eyes—staringly open. He had not been able to make the jaw stay in place or the eyelids remain closed, so he had let them be. But now, as he stood at the door, the ghastly face frightened him.

He saw how white and thin it was; how slender the neck; how wan and sunken the cheeks. The highly arched nose seemed extremely slender and the forehead almost fleshless. He had brushed a stray white lock up from the forehead—tenderly. He had done all he could to make things as pleasant as possible—but he knew now that that face would never wholly leave his memory. He wished he hadn't taken that final look. Better by far for some other detail of the hut to be left on the pane of his consciousness as a last memory.

With a wrench of his brain he brought his eyes from the face. Then he blew a furious gust of breath down the lamp chimney. Even in the gloom the vision of the face lingered. He stood uncertainly a moment, and then stepped outside into the darkness—darkness as black as funeral plumes. He pulled the door shut—pulled it hard so the lock would snap—and fled. In his pockets was the old man's money. The leathern pouch in which the old man had kept his treasure was ashes in the stove.

## II.

Coroner Fitzman turned a loving eye upon two bags of golf-sticks reposing in the corner. He was very busy at his desk—hurried—and it was evident that he was having some difficulty in keeping his mind off the golf-sticks and the rolling meadows known as Hazlehurst Links. He was a dutiful coroner, a painstaking official, but the season was spring.

"I'll tell you, George," he exclaimed, addressing a young man who was reading a newspaper by an open window, "I'll tell you, my boy; we'll let things go to the deuce and get out to Hazlehurst this morning. There's really nothing here that can't be put off until to-morrow—and we'll just leave the office with Gibson; I'll write him a note. What's the use of your visiting me if I'm going to keep you cooped up in this stuffy place all morning, I'd like to know? That's what we'll do, George"—he hastily arranged a few disordered papers beneath a paperweight—"we'll go out there now—right now!"

"You don't expect me to argue *that* point with you, I hope?" smiled George Wellins.

He looked up from the paper, hurled that uninteresting sheet onto a table and lazily stretched himself. He breathed deeply of the spring air which swept through the open window.

"What do you want me to do?" he went on. "Push you back in your chair and command you to go on with your work—on a morning like this? If you think your business can wait, why, Hazlehurst listens pretty good to me."

"Come on, then," laughed Coroner Fitzman, dashing for his hat. "Let's get away—"

He stopped stock still. The merriment faded from his eyes and the laughter died in his throat. The telephone bell had jangled peremptorily.

"Now, what do you suppose *that* is?" he demanded tragically. "A minute more and we'd have been away from here"—regretfully—"but—now what do you imagine that can be?"

"It sounded like the telephone bell," smiled George, nodding his head toward that disturbing instrument. "You might find out by answering."

In a few minutes Coroner Fitzman turned disconsolately from the receiver.

"It's no use," said he, crumpling up the note he had scribbled to Gibson, "the morning has been taken away from us. An old man—Peter Murcell—has been found

dead in his bed. There's no question in the world but what he died a natural death; he's been sick several days; but still there's nothing for me to do but take care of the case." He sat silent a few moments. "I'm sure I can clean it up before lunch, George, and you can go on out to Hazlehurst—and I'll meet you at the clubhouse for lunch."

"Oh, I don't know," said George uncertainly. "I guess I'll stick with you—and we'll go to Hazlehurst together."

And upon so small a thing turned great events. George Wellins, a nephew of Coroner Fitzman, was a detective in the city a hundred miles away. Visiting in the little town, he had no thought of anything even remotely associated with work—and hadn't when he stepped, with the coroner, into the squalid hut of Peter Murcell.

Other officials soon arrived. The hut and the body received the most painstaking examination. Among the other officials was the county physician, who had administered to the old man during his sickness. The neighbor woman who had cooked the old man's meals during his illness, and who had found him dead, was questioned.

"He suffered for years from undernourishment and lack of care," said the county physician. "It was only when he became very sick that he called for any one. It's a wonder he didn't die long before he did. I don't think there's any question in the world but that he died a natural death—simply passed away in his sleep without a struggle. I don't think an autopsy is necessary, or an inquest either—however, that is for the coroner to say."

"You're willing to sign a death certificate?" queried the coroner.

"Surely—I'll attest that he died of senility. It's a plain case of a wasted body giving out during the night."

"It couldn't be anything else but a natural death," suggested Sheriff Woolley. "There's no reason—"

The officials studied one another silently. "He didn't have a dollar in the world," observed the county physician. "What else could it be but a natural death?"

"That's right," said the sheriff. "I haven't got the slightest suspicion of anything else."

And they all agreed with him. The officials didn't think the expense of an inquest justified by the facts, the summoning of a coroner's jury—in a case so evidently a natural death. The conference lasted a few minutes longer and the body was turned over to an undertaker.

George Wellins, when he first entered the hut, had casually surveyed the wasted figure on the bed. Beyond that he had displayed no interest in the case. He set apart during the conference and took no share in the discussion. An hour later he and Coroner Fitzman were well on their way to Hazlehurst.

III.

At his work, Hugo Maxon had not much difficulty in keeping his nerves steady. He forced himself into a natural demeanor, and the men about him saw nothing that they hadn't seen before. He was tired with that eye-burning smartness of fitful sleep—a weariness that makes itself felt in twitching nerves and strange thoughts rather than in a drooping body. A nervous and not a muscular tiredness it was—very disagreeable—but, that day, he kept it to himself.

He dreaded the evening meal at his boarding-house. He knew there would be a story of the death in the evening paper, and he knew there would be some discussion of it at the table. He was known as a friend of the old man, and the thing could hardly be passed by without a word from Hugo Maxon.

The story *was* in the evening paper. The old man, known to the whole town as an eccentric recluse, was "good copy," now that he was dead. The account dwelt upon the mystery associated with his past—it hinted of romance and adventure in earlier days. It was a very readable story, the old man's reticence having been seized upon as an excuse for rather wide speculation, written entertainingly.

The death was mentioned at the supper table—and by Maxon himself. He was driven to it by the silence of the others. It was a subject that had to come up—not for long, just merely mentioned—and better to have it done with at once.

"I see by the paper that old Peter Mur-

cell died last night," he said. He was much pleased by the casual note he got into his tone.

"That so?" queried a man a few seats away from him. "What was the matter with him?"

"Oh, old age, I guess," replied Maxon. "He was past seventy—and I guess he hadn't lived any too well."

"You knew him, didn't you, Hugo?" asked another man.

"Yes, I used to drop in on him once in a while—but I don't think any one knew him very well," Maxon spoke evenly.

"He was a queer old fellow, I guess," the man observed.

"Yes, he was—a queer old fellow."

And that's all there was to it. It was very simple. It wasn't likely that the thing would be mentioned again. Maxon was very glad it was over. After supper he lingered for a time with the other men—in the front room and on the porch. Finally he started up-stairs.

"The body's down at Corbett's undertaking rooms," said a man, looking up from the evening paper. "Let's go down and take a look at it."

Maxon stopped in the doorway and turned slowly. He saw that the man's remark had been addressed to the company in general.

"I don't mind," agreed one.

"I'm too tired," added another.

"I never had any desire to view bodies," said Maxon slowly. "I'm going to bed." And he did.

Despite the fact that there had been no hint in the newspaper story of the least suspicion in connection with Peter Murcell's death, Hugo Maxon was decidedly uneasy—uneasier than he had ever had any idea he would be.

Sitting in his room, alone, he tried to analyze this uneasiness. He knew he had no fear of arrest. There was no chance of suspicion—no one but himself knew the old man had money, and he had stumbled upon that fact merely by accident. There were no meddling relatives. There was no one who might be too "nosey" and demand an investigation. There was no reason why any one should think of such a thing.

And yet he was uneasy. Ah! he had it. He knew why he was uneasy. It was because the *face* was yet above ground.

It would be buried very soon now, and he need have no further worry about that. It might be buried to-morrow—very soon, anyway. He must forget. He must drive it from his mind. He must sleep. He drummed that into his brain until he thought he had control of himself. Then he lay down.

But the face remained with him. Even in his slumber, it was there—so that the sleep did not accomplish much toward quieting his tremulous nerves. He wasn't bothered by a dread of the supernatural. There was no horror of his victim appearing before him in ghostly form. He was far too sensible to permit such things as that to disturb him. But the thing that *did* disturb him was that the face was yet above ground.

He found himself wishing that he had not taken that final look in the hut. He remembered the sagging jaw and staring eyes. Of course, the undertaker had fixed all that by this time. He knew the face was as gentle and as peaceful as a sleeping baby's at that very moment—but yet *he* always would recall it as he had last seen it; and that was very disturbing. He found that out before morning. He dreaded to face his companions at breakfast and at the shop—but it had to be done.

He was yet sufficiently in control of himself to carry the thing off. His eyes burned, but no one except himself knew that. He steadied himself and carried on the table-talk satisfactorily. He saw one of the men reading the morning paper. He hoped he would not find something new about the old man and comment on it. He did not. Maxon got hold of the paper after breakfast.

He could have screamed with joy over the thing he read. The story was a mere paragraph, with no hint of the least suspicion. The last sentence gave him a thrill—"The funeral will be held at two o'clock this afternoon at the chapel in the undertaking rooms, and burial will be in Greenpoint cemetery."

Only a few hours more and the face

would be under ground! A great flood of joy surged over him, and he was almost himself again. Funny what a difference a few feet of earth would make! The face was still a part of the world in which he moved. It was being viewed by persons with whom he came into contact. It was touched possibly by the very air he breathed. It was almost as though the face were yet alive. The dread of it was a reality enhanced by the reality of its existence above ground.

But—well, in only a few hours now the face would be removed from the world in which he lived. It would cease to be an earthly thing. It would be hidden from the gaze of everybody. It would have no existence at all—nothing but a memory—and he was sure that memory would fade, and then die, after the face was taken away. Yes, he had but a few hours more of torture to endure—and then all would be well.

"Are you going to old Murcell's funeral?" a companion asked him on the way to the shop.

"No," said Maxon. "If it were Sunday I'd go—but I don't feel like losing half a day's work."

He went through the day all right. He fought off the dizzy spells that resulted from his sleeplessness, and he forced himself to eat—forced himself to appear natural. That evening he read of the funeral.

The face was now under ground. He breathed deeply with great relief. Even on the instant he felt easier. There was no denying the fact that a few feet of earth made a vast difference. He sought his bed early that night—and things were as he had imagined. With the face under ground he got his mind completely away from it, and, reading until his eyes drooped, he sank into a long, restful sleep.

In the morning he was quite himself again. He went cheerfully about his work. His appetite came back and his bodily vigor returned so quickly that he couldn't make himself believe he had ever been disturbed. That night he slept even better than he had the night before.

And then, next day, the terrible thing happened!

The evening paper carried a story that the body had been exhumed and was being held in Corbett's morgue pending an investigation. There was a great deal of mystery about it. The paper didn't state what developments had brought about the exhumation of the remains. It had been ordered by Coroner Fitzman, and that official refused to state what turn of affairs had led to his extraordinary action. There was nothing to be made public, he said, until his investigation was completed.

The paper speculated over a wide range. It hinted of poison, and an investigation by the State chemist. It hinted at mysterious relatives. It hinted at money. It hinted at everything except Hugo Maxon, or any individual. There was not a suggestion that suspicion was directed toward him—but, strange to say, Maxon got but small comfort out of that.

*The face was again above ground!* That preyed upon his mind above everything else. Once more he was confronted by that sagging jaw and those staring eyes. He knew positively that the jaw did not sag any more, and that the eyes were closed—but still that's the way he saw them; that's the way he would see them as long as that face remained unburied.

There was no indication in the newspaper story of when the investigation would be completed and the body restored to its grave. Confound them! Why didn't they remove the vital organs, if they suspected poison, and bury the rest of the body—why didn't they get the face under ground? Why keep that gruesome exhibit lying on a slab? He read the story again. He gathered that the body might be kept above ground a week—and he very much doubted whether he could stand it that long.

So far as that night was concerned, it was sleepless—and he felt that the next would be the same, if the body were not buried again by that time. He was again thrown upon his mettle. He forced himself to eat and to talk naturally. This was harder now than it had been because the exhumation of the old man's body made a lively topic. He heard it at every meal, he heard it on the way to and from the shop and at the shop. And, known as a friend of the old man, he must join in it!

He did so, but it nearly broke him down. So far he hadn't been called in, as had other friends, to tell what he knew of the old man. That thought alarmed him.

Two sleepless nights had driven him to nervous exhaustion—and yet he kept on working. Time and again he was near flight, but quickly pulled himself back, for flight would, at this time, be an admission of guilt. He clubbed himself into a natural, confident demeanor, but on the third day he knew that something would have to be done. The morning paper shed no further light on the investigation, the nature of the suspicions of the authorities, or when the body would be returned to the earth.

And then the big idea came to him!

The thing that worried him most was the constant vision of the face as he last had seen it in the hut. Why not go to the body and gaze upon the face as it was now? Why not see it peaceful and in repose? Why not stamp upon his brain another image of the face—one far different than the sagging jaw and staring eyes? Would not the peaceful face at the morgue efface the terrible face of the hut? He would have another image as a last memory. Yes, it was a very clever plan to cheat his fancy.

So that evening he went to the Corbett undertaking rooms. The morgue was a small stone building across the alley from the rear of the main establishment. He sauntered into the offices and asked if he might view Peter Murcell's body.

This was in charge of Coroner Fitzman, he was told, and only a permit from him would gain Maxon his wish. He said he wasn't anxious enough to see it to go to all that trouble—and departed; departed for another sleepless night.

Next day he laid off work at noon. In the afternoon he sought from Coroner Fitzman a permit to view Peter Murcell's body. The coroner refused the request—and Maxon dragged himself to his room.

And then another idea came to him. He would view that face despite the coroner and the attendants at the undertaking room!

Thus, very late that night, he crept up the alley leading to the morgue back of Corbett's undertaking establishment. He had a sudden fear that looking upon the face under the gruesome conditions which now confronted him—the ghastly morgue and slabs, spectral in the pale moonlight—might be even worse than the thing which yet gripped his fancy. He almost lost heart. But no, nothing could be worse than the face now imprinted on his quivering brain. So he kept on.

The task of getting into the morgue was not a hard one for a strong man armed with tools from the shop. He lifted a side window and soon stood within the ghastly interior. There was but the one body there.

It was very near at hand. Gazing about, he saw it almost instantly. He saw the sheet which overspread the figure on the slab. He saw, indistinctly yet surely, the convolutions in the sheet marking the various parts of the body. He stepped toward it, stopped—and then, with quick decision, drew to its side.

Suddenly the morgue was flooded with light. Coroner Fitzman and Sheriff Woolley stepped from a little room into the full glare. Hugo Maxon, sobbing hysterically, sank to the floor.

In less than two hours Maxon was in jail and the authorities had his full confession.

IV.

"Of course," Coroner Fitzman explained next day, "the body never was exhumed. The thing on the slab was nothing more than a couple of pillows arranged under a sheet.

"The young man who was visiting me, George Wellins, led me into my first suspicion. He noticed that the body in the hut was lying straight, with the bedclothing carefully smoothed out. He saw that the legs were pulled out carefully, and the arms stretched down at the sides. That was, he thought, strange—if the old man had died alone. The body looked as though some one had laid it out after death. George mentioned all these things to me, and suggested a little plan.

"It was very hard for any of us to believe that murder had been committed. There was such a total absence of motive. No one, until Maxon confessed, had the

faintest idea that the old man had money. Wellins himself doubted that murder had been committed. Nevertheless, we got busy.

"If there was a slayer, we reasoned that he would be worried if he thought the body was still above ground. So we worked the 'exhumation' story. If he were still in the neighborhood, he would show the strain in some way. He might be drawn to the 'body'—but, if he wasn't, he would be bound to reveal himself in some other way, if his nerves were rubbed and pounded long enough. I never suspected Maxon until he made two attempts to view the body. Then we waited for him. Had he known the body was under ground, it isn't likely he ever would have revealed himself—but a murderer, unless he has lost all human instincts—cannot endure for long the thought of his victim being in the open daylight and open air."

# Gustave's Punctured Romance

*by* Grace Lovell Bryan

GUSTAVE D'ESPRIT, dapper proprietor of The Hat Shop Parisienne, adjusted his new Panama carefully over his toupee, locked the door, twirled his cane, and tripped jauntily down the street toward his boarding house, humming: "There are s-s-m-iles that make you h-happy, there are s-s-miles that make you blu-ue—"

Business was flourishing—the season for taffeta had far exceeded his own expectations; he had not bought Milan, though advised to in the spring, and, *voila!* Milan had not been worn. And, far more important than these sordid details of business, he was in love.

"Where love is—" sings the poet; therefore Gustave disposed of his dinner as though prunes were lobster a la Newburgh; folded his napkin with that detached air that spoke of a mind floating in ethereal vapor, and ran up the stairs to his room.

He took from an inner pocket a small photograph and gazed at it beatifically. How beautiful she was! What glorious blue eyes—what clouds of fluffy golden hair, like— He replaced the photograph hastily and reached for the hair brush. The alarm clock on the dresser pointed to seven o'clock. He was to call for her at eight.

An hour later, gazing searchingly in the mirror, he heaved a sigh of satisfaction. His mustache was waxed its fiercest, his hair resembled a seal's back. A delicate mauve tie harmonized with his violet spats. In a word, he was exquisite.

"I am, what you call heem," he murmured approvingly, "all to the mus-tar'! She cannot fail to impress!" He smiled dizzily. The prospect was enchanting.

And right here, the course of true love began to zigzag in its usual fashion. In other words, Harry Graves bounced violently into the room.

Graves, his roommate, was a baseball-at-

tending, inexplicable party with an overwhelming propensity for laughing at inopportune moments, employed in the office of some vulgar factory. He carried in his hand a battered straw hat which he threw savagely on the floor, emitting a series of words that caused little chills of gooseflesh to run up and down Gustave's spine.

"Look—look!" he cried, kicking at the hat.

"What's the matter?" inquired Gustave, coldly.

"Matter? Can't you see?" cried Graves angrily, "the damned thing blew off and a street car ran over it—of all the— Look!"

Gustave looked, then broke into a roar of laughter.

"I can see you," he shrieked, "you run your legs off—and the trolley ride over your hat and charge you no fare! For nossing!"

He would have gone off into another explosion, but recollected and stopped immediately. He might burst a button. "Eet iss nossing," he said calmly, when his gravity was restored, "to-morrow you can secure for youself anozzer at ze hat store."

"To-morrow, you fat head?" growled Graves. "What good is that—I want to go out to-night! I've got a date!"

Gustave did not reply. He was busy with his nails.

"The swellest little dame!" continued Graves gloomily; "saw her on the way home and followed her to her house, and say—she flashed me a smile when she went in, that—oh, boy!" His gesture was eloquent. "Believe me, I'm going to meet her! Big blue eyes, and a—"

"I am not interes'," interrupted Gustave. He patted the photograph lovingly under his coat. "I go to the theater to-night myself with a lovely one."

"Yaah, Petunia Gibbs, the Harlem Venus," said Graves sarcastically. "Well, they say she's got some dough salted away, old top, and beauty is, what beauty has. Why not make her Mrs. Gus?"

"Petunia Gibbs!" cried Gustave, scornfully. The very mention of her name in connection with the other made him shudder.

Petunia, a regular customer, cherished, as he had long known, a secret admiration for him. For strictly business reasons he had, occasionally, paid her various attentions; also she had considerable income; in other words, a dot, in case—

It was true he did require a wife. Only the day before, his fat saleslady had asked him for a raise; her salary already ate up a good deal of his profits. A wife—? He had of late given the matter much thought, but now—golden hair and glorious blue eyes were an absolute requisite. Petunia stood five feet eleven in her stockings, and her hair was a scraggly brown.

"You told me she asked you yesterday to take her to a show," returned Graves, "and you were going to, to-night." He lit a cigarette and sat back, grinning. "What's the idea?"

"Eet iss true," replied Gustave with dignity, "I am not indifferent to Mees Gibbs, and I did make the appointment with her to escort her to the movable picture. She buy a hat." He shrugged. "But this afternoon ah, mon Dieu! the mos' beautiful angel arrive in ze store—I have never seen such a—a—" Words failed him. "Eet iss on that account I forget completely Petunia Gibbs. The other one—ah!" His expression was ecstatic. "What you think the first thing this charmant creature do when she see me?"

"Threw her arms around your neck and kissed you," suggested Graves, with sarcasm.

"No. She did not. She give me her photograph!"

"What? A dame come into the store and give you her picture—the first time she ever saw you?"

Gustave nodded triumphantly. Graves stared at him. "She must be a nut," he concluded.

"A nut?" repeated Gustave in some bewilderment. "I do not know her religion. She come to take orders for a photographer, and she have her own photograph as a sample."

"And she say she have so hard a time to sell in such an appealing gesture, I say, with a smile and elegance, 'I have my picture take two dozen times if you give to me this photograph of youself—and go to the theater with me to-night!"

"And she said she would?" grinned Graves.

Gustave nodded with dignity. "After I pay her the nine dollars in advance for the two dozen photograph."

Graves laughed, for no apparent reason. "But what about Petunia?" he asked quizzically.

Gustave laughed heartily. "As you say to me many time," he said airily, "I should think hard upon the matter!"

In great good humor he reached for his hat, then paused. Why not share his triumph? He took out the photograph and held it before Graves's eyes.

"There!" he beamed with rapture. "Iss she not per-fection?"

Graves stared at it; his jaw dropped. A queer look came over his face.

"Ah, you envy me!" smiled Gustave proudly. "But I do not blame you. I must hurry. She will be waiting. Perhaps—who knows?" he said smugly, "she will fall in love, eh?" He turned a slow semicircle. "My toilet for the evening, iss it—O. Q?"

A curious gleam appeared in Graves's brown eyes.

"You look great, Gus, old boy!" he said enthusiastically—"but my God—there's powder all down the back of your coat!"

Gustave turned with a word and ran to the closet for the whiskbroom.

"Say, can I wear one of your hats?" asked Graves.

"Certainly!" returned Gustave, brushing vigorously. "Take you peeck."

Graves opened the closet door and selected from seven others on the top shelf, a straw hat with a black band.

"Well, so long," he continued, opening the hall door. "See you later, Gus. Say, your clock's fifteen minutes fast!"

"Au revoir," murmured Gustave, gazing with a handglass fixedly in the mirror, as the door closed. His brow cleared. Flecking an infinitesimal speck of dust from his right shoulder, he stood back to view the ensemble. Removing the pearl stickpin from his mauve scarf, he placed it a fraction of an inch further to the left; then smiled. He was perfection.

Humming "Un Peu d'Amour," he took up his Panama, plucked his cane leisurely from its corner, shook his cuffs, and strode with careless elegance down the stairs and out into the street in the direction of her home—his soul romping, as it were, in Elysian fields. There was plenty of time since his clock was fast.

How soft and mellow was the evening air—how soothing the gentle fragrance of spring! He jumped hastily out of the way of a passing automobile. And the sky—of a glorious cerulean, like her eyes. The pink in her exquisite cheeks resembled the rose flush of the clouds at dawn; her teeth were—

*Sacré—!* In front of him stood Petunia!

He paused in horror. She was in a yard talking to a woman in a white wrapper who sat on the porch of the adjacent house. She wore a pink gown and the saffron-colored hat purchased from him the day before; *dressed for the evening!* Luckily her back was turned, but he could hear her laughter. He shuddered, glancing hastily up at the signpost. Good heavens! he had inadvertently taken her very street!

He vanished quickly back around the corner from whence he had come, crossed the street, and continued his journey by way of the block above. He mopped his brow. As Graves would say, it was a close shaving.

He walked on blithely. The birds sang sweetly in the maple at his right. How beautiful was nature! The moon, rising behind an electric sign that proclaimed the perfect toothbrush, shone brightly, casting its rays on rich and poor alike.

Happiness is indeed a leveler. He beamed upon a ragged urchin on the curb, then smiled benignly on a little girl tripping along in a silken frock. The true wealth was, after all, a contented heart. Great heavens! —it couldn't be—but yes, it was! His jaw dropped. There, *again*, was Petunia!

He stared wrathfully, his mouth open. There she was. This time she was coming out of a drug-store, directly in his path. She had a bag in her hand—peppermints! What on earth ailed the woman! he thought irritably. Why didn't she stay at home, where she belonged! instead of wandering around like—*Sacré!* She turned hastily toward him. She was coming his way!

He sprang hastily into the doorway at his right.

"Here, you little shrimp! What's the idee?" Gustave turned around. He had collided with a tall man, evidently engaged in locking the front door of some kind of a shop, who glared belligerently. Gustave did not answer. Poking his head out carefully, he saw that Petunia was bearing down upon him, swinging those infernal peppermints! In another minute they would be face to face—

"Let me in!" He turned frantically. "I wish to buy—"

"Not a chance!" returned the man with a growl. "What do you think this is—an all night restaurant? The place is closed!"

Petunia was coming closer. He could hear her firm step, distinctly audible above the noise of traffic.

"But—oh, *nom du chien!* I wish to purchase!" cried Gustave imploringly. The man shook his head. "Quick! I buy!—oh, *mon Dieu!* eet is death and life!"

The man stared, then inserting the key in the lock, swung the door open. Gustave pushed madly past him into the gloom of the store, just as a tall form tripped modestly past the lighted entrance. Gustave leaned against the counter. He was saved!

"Well, what'll you have?" growled the man, switching on a light overhead. "Don't be all day. I ain't spending my life on this job."

Gustave stared bewilderedly at him. What will he have? The man fixed him with a hard black eye. Suddenly, Gustave noted the clock above his head. He paled. Twenty-five minutes after eight!

"Great heavens!" he gasped. "Iss zat the correct—hour?"

"Sure. Now never mind the time. You're catching no train." The man leaned over the counter. "What are you going to buy?"

Buy! Of course. He had mentioned—But the hour—she would be waiting! How could time have elapsed so quickly. Graves had said— The man continued to stare, thrusting out a firm jaw.

"I buy," Gustave said, hurriedly—but what? It was clear he should have to take something. Suddenly a bright thought struck him. Of course—a present for her. It was a splendid idea. She would thus pardon the lateness of his arrival.

"Give me a bracelet!" he announced enthusiastically, "An adornment—something for a lady!"

"Look here, you tryin' to kid me?" growled the man, irascibly. "This is a hardware store!"

"I take a dog collar," returned Gustave weakly. The time—he must hurry!

"Well, that's better," said the man, thrusting his hand inside a glass case. "What size do you wear—I mean your dog?"

"I have none."

"What?"

"I buy the dog to-morrow. To-night I fit heem to the neck," Gustave cried. "Please hurry!"

The man selected one from the case. "Twelve-fifty," he said evenly, wrapping it up. "I give you the best one in the store."

Gustave drew out the money and started for the door.

"Hey, what'll I do with this?" called the man, holding out the package he had finished wrapping.

"Keep—I call—to-morrow!" came the trailing voice of Gustave as he dashed out the door and down the street in the direction of her home. She would be weeping, perhaps, thinking him false! As he ran, he saw before him her reproving face, her big, blue eyes—

A group of children playing at a corner howled and screamed as they fell in all directions from his advancing pace. Cries of "Stop"—"Police" reached him dimly, as from a great distance. A twinge of rheumatism tweaked his knee. It always came on him when he went too fast; but no matter. Nothing mattered but her golden hair, her pink, dawn-flushed cheeks—

He panted up the steps of her dwelling, and rang the bell.

A man came to the door.

"Tell Mees Green that I am here," commanded Gustave, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"She ain't home," the man replied.

"Ain't—?" stammered Gustave, in astonishment.

"No. She went to the theater."

Gustave stared at him. He tried to speak but his voice failed him.

"Yes, Gladys went about two minutes ago, to the Empire," continued the man, "with some fellow; a right smart young boy, too. Looked as though he had plenty of go in him."

Go! Without a word Gustave turned determinedly down the steps, toward the Empire. His collar swam; his violet spats were dusty from the road, his mustache discouraged—but not he. He would follow her to the ends of the earth—and kill this "smart young boy" if he refused to give her up!

A few late-comers were hastening into the Empire as Gustave reached its brilliantly lighted entrance—and then he paused, for a sight met his eyes that chilled his blood!

Directly in front of him, just disappearing into the lobby, laughing, absorbed in each other, her big blue eyes gazing tenderly up into his rival's face, was Miss Green of the photograph—*his* Miss Green; and *Graves, his roommate*—his *friend!*—with *his* hat on his head—and *his girl upon his perfidious arm!*

He clapped his hand agonizedly to his brow—how *could* she! And Graves!

Women were fickle, unworthy, that was of course, an undisputed fact—but she, for whom he had cast aside another, for whose dear sake he had evaded Petunia—twice—left her, waiting, at the church—

He gazed appealingly into the heavens, and then, caught in the glare of the Empire's electric sign that announced the play, his eyes stared first dazedly, then comprehendingly at the words:

"PAID IN FULL!"

He decided to go home.

"Oh, there you are! I've been looking all over for you. You're late!" came a soprano voice at his elbow. He looked up.

It was Petunia!

He smiled, wanly. He might as well. He glanced up into her adoring eyes, and sighed. Ah, what a falling off was there in spite of her choice of hats, from that Other! Side by side with round blue eyes and baby face, her petals drooped and died.

"I came to tell you, I must go home. I have a sickness," he murmured faintly.

"Where?"

"In my diaphragm."

"But we were going to the pictures!"

"Pictures!" He shook his head gloomily. "There are some who can appreciate, who contemplate me not unmoved," he thought. Then he sighed again, and looked darkly at a girl passing by, with yellow hair.

Purchasing a rose from an Italian passing by, Petunia pinned it in his buttonhole.

"Oh, do come, Mr. D'Esprit, it will do you good!"

"You were waiting for me?" queried Gustave.

"I would wait forever, *for you,*" replied Petunia, shyly, as she guided him gently across the street. "They have such exciting pictures over here. The Triograph is simply wonderful! Oh, there's Harold de Launcelot, the famous leading man—he's in that one! See?"

Ecstatically she pointed to a highly colored billboard at their right.

Gustave, following her gaze, read:

HAROLD DE LAUNCELOT

In

"WE CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING!"

He stared at it, thunderstruck. It was true!

He turned to Petunia. She smiled, worshipfully, down upon him, and pressed his arm. True, she had not adorable features, the charm of— But it was equally true that she would stand without hitching.

All is not gold that glitters. When one buys a package, it is the contents, not the wrapper, that one must consider. Also, he would fire that saleslady in the morning! He drew a deep breath.

His shoulders straightened. He had made up their minds.

With the gesture of a Napoleon he drew from his breast the photograph of Miss Green and tore it into bits; removed the fur cap from a placid brow, took Petunia's purse out of her hand, and marched jauntily to the box office.

A moment later he escorted his future wife into the lobby.

# The Log-Book

## By the Editor

CONTINUING with our biographies of THE ARGOSY authors, I present herewith some facts about Francis Stevens, whose "Citadel of Fear" awoke such enthusiastic comments when it ran its course in this magazine a few months ago. This time I'll give them in the contributor's own words, sent in response to a request of mine, tendered in its turn as a result of eager inquiries concerning a writer who has made so pronounced a hit with THE ARGOSY clientele.

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Parents both of literary tastes, and I was brought up in the midst of books, though I had to leave school at the end of the grammar grades and go to work. I had a little talent for drawing, and wished to become an illustrator. Studied nights for some years, but finally gave it up.

I wrote my first story when I was seventeen and working in the office of a department store. It had just one merit, as I remember it, and that was a rather grotesque originality. Of course, in the writer's estimation it was a very wonderful story, but, nevertheless, I was more than surprised when THE ARGOSY, the first magazine to which it was submitted, accepted it. Within a week or so of that the *Youth's Companion* accepted a couple of verses, also a first offering, and naturally, being seventeen and optimistic, I believed my literary career established. But they were both "beginner's luck"—flukes—and though I persisted, for a while my success did not. So I dropped the "literary career," and several years intervened before I even attempted anything save desultory scribbling for my own amusement.

Then I spent a year in newspaper work, which I detested; but it reawoke the ambition to write. Again I was fortunate with a first story, and since then have not deserted the field.

* * *

"Psychometry" may explain a part of it, for "there are more things in heaven and earth" that one may dream of, perchance to find them real. Not since Benson's "The Image in the Sand," that terrifically convincing story of the supernormal, has there been published anything to equal

## "CLAIMED"

### BY FRANCIS STEVENS

**Author of "Avalon," "Citadel of Fear," etc.**

which begins as a three-part serial in THE ARGOSY for March 6. And that this is a conservative statement you'll agree when you first behold the green box, read, or try to read the sinking inscription, see for yourself the ruin of the red cities, wait, with *Vanaman*, for that last, tremendous, *silent* cataclysm—and when you have come to those two words: "The End," if, as it may well be, the hour is two in the morning, you'll find yourself looking over your shoulder for that dread visitant, the Lord of the Red Dolphin, the one whose name must not be spoken lest he hear it, and answer the call.

* * *

Even as *En-ro*, Carver of Tusks, tamed the Red God to the uses of his people, so *Ken-o-san*, Hunter of Beasts, loosed the Winged Death in the hour of the Ta-an's greatest need.

And when you have read the story—and I'm certain you won't want to miss a word of it—you'll agree that

# "THE LORD OF THE WINGED DEATH"

## BY PAUL L. ANDERSON

**Author of "The Son of the Red God," etc.**

is even better than that poem of the primitive, "The Son of the Red God." Their bones are dust these many centuries past: hunter and maiden; great chief and traitorous wooer—but their deeds live again in the stirring pages of this realistic romance of the world's morning. This will be published as a complete novelette in THE ARGOSY for March 6.

"THE MAUDS OF MULESFOOT," by Wolcott LeClear Beard, one of next week's short stories, is as clever as its title in mixing affairs at a mining-camp in a concoction that will appeal strongly to your appetite for thrills, combined with comedy. In "THE KEEPER OF MORALS," Roy W. Hinds gives a wonderfully realistic picture of the inside workings of a big store capped by a climax that fairly brought me up standing when I read it. "PA'S PANTS," by Louise Platt Hauck, throws a new sidelight on the Pollyanna cult, incidentally emphasizing the adage "there's no fool like an old fool."

Next week's number of THE ARGOSY, by the way, marks an important milestone in its career, of which I shall have more to say in the forthcoming Log.

### THE ARGOSY'S WIDE RANGE

Sacramento, California.

I have just finished reading a letter by Percy E. Morse in the Log-Book for November 29, and want to say I agree with him about Charles Alden Seltzer—"Drag Harlan," "Beau Rand," "Square Deal Sanderson," and the others are all the same. The first one I read was interesting, but by the time I waded through all of them they grew monotonous. He has the right subject, that of the old West; but, for the reader's sake, get him to change the characters a little.

Enough for criticism. I am glad to hear about the coming of the sequel to the "Black Wolf of Picardy," by Stilson, as that, in my opinion, was one of the most interesting stories I have ever read in THE ARGOSY. Stilson, G. W. Ogden, and Achmed Abdullah are, I think, the best writers for THE ARGOSY. I also enjoyed very much "The Isle of Drums," "Between Worlds," "Luck," "The Mating of the Blades," and "Playing the System." These are a good sample, I believe, of THE ARGOSY's stories. Let's have more stories of the old West, the South Seas, and a corking six-part serial of the Northwest Mounted Police.

The one big thing about THE ARGOSY is that it has a wide range of stories so as to please everybody. Wishing you every success,

BRUCE MCALLISTER.

### "THE THIRD ACT" WAS BY FRED JACKSON

Dayton, Ohio.

I have never as yet written to the Log-Book, but one must sometimes unburden his mind, and I am sure that if more readers, who have followed THE ARGOSY as long as I, and who are so perfectly satisfied as to price and stories, would write, your Log-Book would have to be tripled in size in order to print the letters of praise.

I have to recall that when I was introduced to THE ARGOSY there were running at that time several serials and complete stories, *viz*: "The Black Smudge," "The Taking of the Liberator," "For the Honor of the Fighting Fifty," "The Green Triangle," and the laughable Hawkins stories. I also thought that "The Third Act," by Edgar Franklin, was fine, but do not like farce-comedy stories that he writes.

But the best story of all that I have ever read in THE ARGOSY was "Citadel of Fear," and I have looked in the Log for more praise of that story, but it seems not to have made such a hit with the other readers as it did with me. The Western stories by Charles Alden Seltzer are fine, but there is too much sameness about them, and it spoils them by running them too often. Well, I have relieved my mind, and am going out to buy the next copy of THE ARGOSY as soon as it arrives. Best wishes for its safe voyage. An old reader.

W. B. LEE.

### SANDERS AN ARGOSY CONTRIBUTOR FOR THREE YEARS

Stellarton, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Have been a constant reader of your magazine for about a year, and must say it is splendid. It is the only magazine I read.

I have just finished reading issues for November 8 and 15. I agree with Mr. Dudley about "The

Hoodoo Mine." It sure was a shallow hole. This is a mining country, and the majority of mines are about four thousand to five thousand feet deep. The Drummond at Westville, Nova Scotia, is no less than eight thousand feet. Some mine, eh? Another fault with "The Hoodoo Mine," a little thing like a broken axle would never scare a bunch of real miners. That happens every day in any mine. And about killing mules, I work in the Albion slopes, and we cast out a dead horse every week. Hope I haven't said enough to discourage Mr. Jenks. I think if it were possible for him to visit a real mine he would be able to write a wonderful story.

"Drag Harlan" is fine. "Skack of the Everglades" is also good. "Between Worlds" was marvelous, and "Anything but the Truth" was—well, I might say capital. All Seltzer's stories are good. Am glad to hear he is writing another one.

I am glad to see Charles Wesley Sanders back. If I remember right, he left us in the *Railroad Man's Magazine*. Am I right?

By the way, I used to read the *Railroad Man's* regularly before taking THE ARGOSY. It was great, but THE ARGOSY is certainly a good sub. Here's hoping I may never miss a copy, and wishing it was a daily. Good luck to THE ARGOSY.

DAN MACEACHERN.

## A MATTER OF GOAT GETTING

Columbus, Montana.

"Hurrah for the editor of the Log-Book," say I. Well, here are my opinions of the Log-Book and the good old ARGOSY.

It sure makes me laugh to read some of the letters in the Log-Book; they are sure comical. Now, for instance, Percy E. Morse, of Jackson, Michigan, he says that Seltzer's stories are all alike, that they are all about the bad man that controls the town, the girl, and a rancher, and a cowboy. Well, what more do you want in a story? That is the kind that are worth reading. These Oriental stories sure get my goat, and also get the goat of the rest of THE ARGOSY readers around this part of the country, and the same with those South Seas stories, and all seafaring stories for that matter. You can bet your Aunt Jemima I'm for the dry land.

Miss Olive Whitstone, of Niles, Ohio, sends in a plea in the Log-Book for an Irish story. Well, leave out the foreign stories, and THE ARGOSY will be much better appreciated. Miss Whitstone says not to put in so many serials and more short stories. Well, here's a warning to put in all the serials you can and leave out those silly short stories, for they sure get people's goats. That is, people that have any common horse sense. Those complete novelettes are generally pretty good, though. But there is never more than one of those in each ARGOSY.

My favorite things in life are reading THE ARGOSY, riding a cayuse, eating, and my beauty sleep. I am reading "Drag Harlan," by Charles Alden Seltzer. I sure do like his stories. Especially "Beau Rand," and "Square Deal Sanderson." There are quite a few other stories that I like as well. "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "The Joyous Troublemaker"; but I can't think of them all just now.

It sure makes me angry to read some of the letters in THE ARGOSY. I sure feel like taking some of them in hand, but I suppose it will be the same with some of them. They will feel like taking me in hand when they read my letter. Well, I don't blame them.

Here's hoping this letter will stay shy of the waste-basket and be published in the Log.

KATHRYN HUCK.

## NOT ENVYING THE EDITOR HIS JOB

Jens, Montana.

I am sending my renewal to THE ARGOSY, and although a little late I hope I will get my ARGOSY without too much inconvenience to you. I don't want to miss a number with "The Son of the Black Wolf" in. "The Black Wolf of Picardy" was a dandy, and his son starts out with *some action*.

I haven't had time to keep up with THE ARGOSY, so have missed a lot of good stories, but I want 'em to keep coming, so won't let THE ARGOSY go. Sure glad to have a sequel to "Peter the Brazen." Haven't read it yet, but will begin to-night.

I have no kick, but I have a question to ask: Where is Joseph Ivers Lawrence? I've sure missed him. He hasn't had a story in for a coon's age.

Also would like another by Ogden. His "Duke of Chimney Butte" was great. And "Luck," by John Frederick, was sure a hummer, and am glad we're going to have a sequel to it. I agree with Mrs. P. I. W. in saying *Pierre* would have to come back. He couldn't "stand" town as well as I could, and I can't stand it at all, unless you call two weeks standing it. That's the limit.

J. E. Grinstead's "Exodus of Bull Milligan" was a corker, and so are all of Grinstead's. Another good author is Gordon MacCreagh with his *Smith* stories. For a short story you can't beat Chief Henry Red Eagle's "High Pitching." Believe you me, that's a story. By the way, since some guys have been knocking Samuel G. Camp, I notice his stories are lacking their good old punch and life. For instance, his "Down but Never Out." It was good, but there seemed to be something missing. Now don't let anybody persuade you to let Camp go, because here's one who likes him, and don't think he's silly. I notice there are others who think the same as I do.

Somebody always wants to take the joy out of life. What with all these knockers and anti-knockers, I'll say you have some job to keep the boat afloat, and when I think of it I'm glad I'm one of the passengers, and wouldn't swap jobs if you threw in a horse and saddle to boot.

If you print this I would like to know who wrote the story "Beyond the Skyline." I'm ashamed of myself for forgetting an author like that, as I generally don't forget the good ones. I can always remember what an author has written as soon as I see his name, except the one in question.

Believe me, I understand H. A. S. in regard to initials. Never thought of that before. Nevertheless, I'll sign my full name. A life-long ARGOSY booster.

ELI CHRISTENSEN.

"Beyond the Skyline" (January 12-February 9, 1918) was written by James Oliver Winslow. Since the war Mr. Lawrence has gone into business life.

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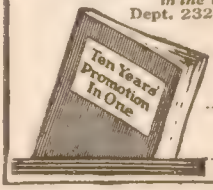


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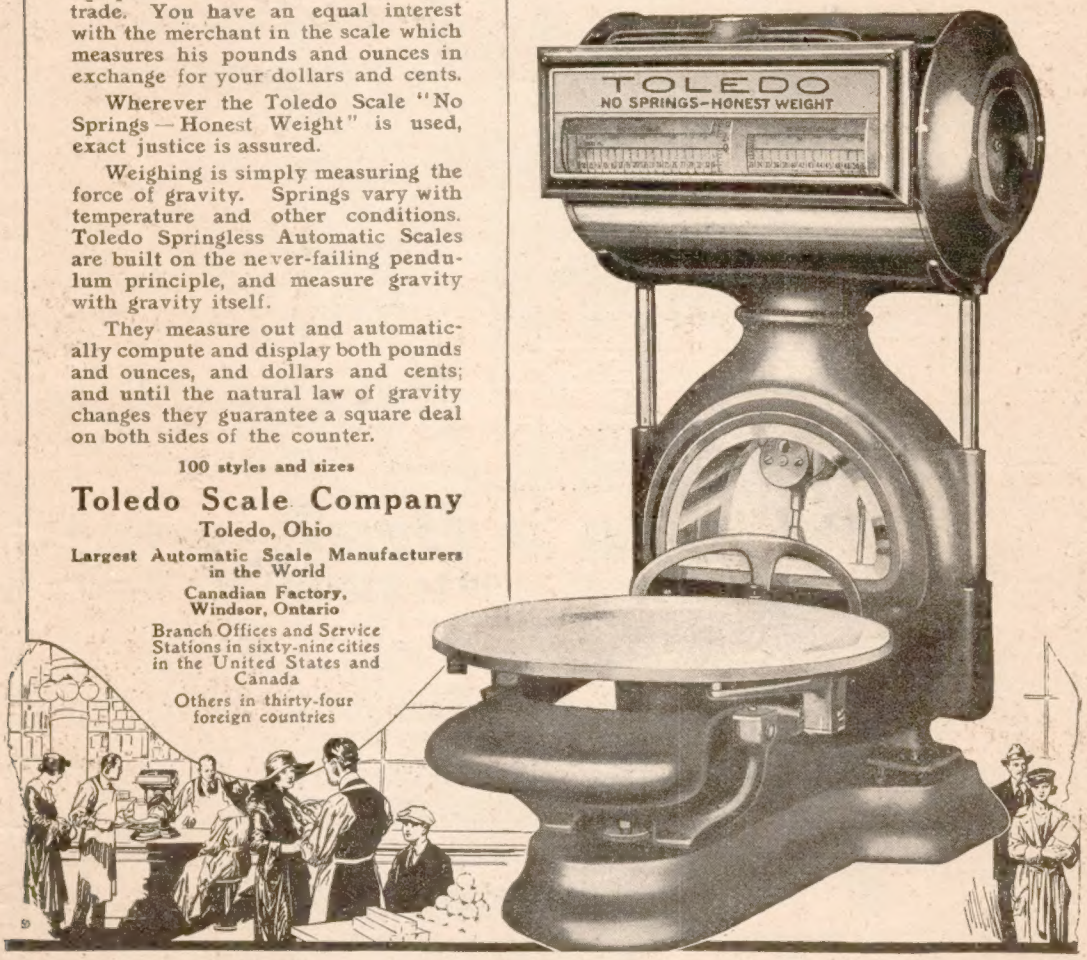


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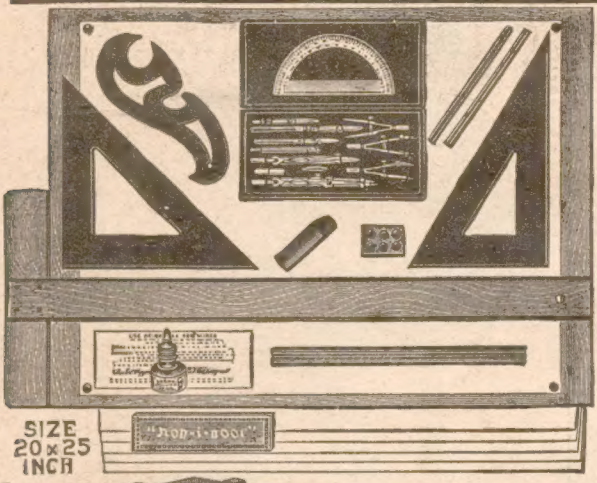


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